The Wire 472 June 2023

The Wire

Adventures in Sound and Music

The Wire 472 June 2023

No Home
Natalia Beylis
Nondi_
Kristen Roos
Andy Akiho
Scatter Archive
Lewis Taylor
Sparks
Adele Bertei
Big Ears

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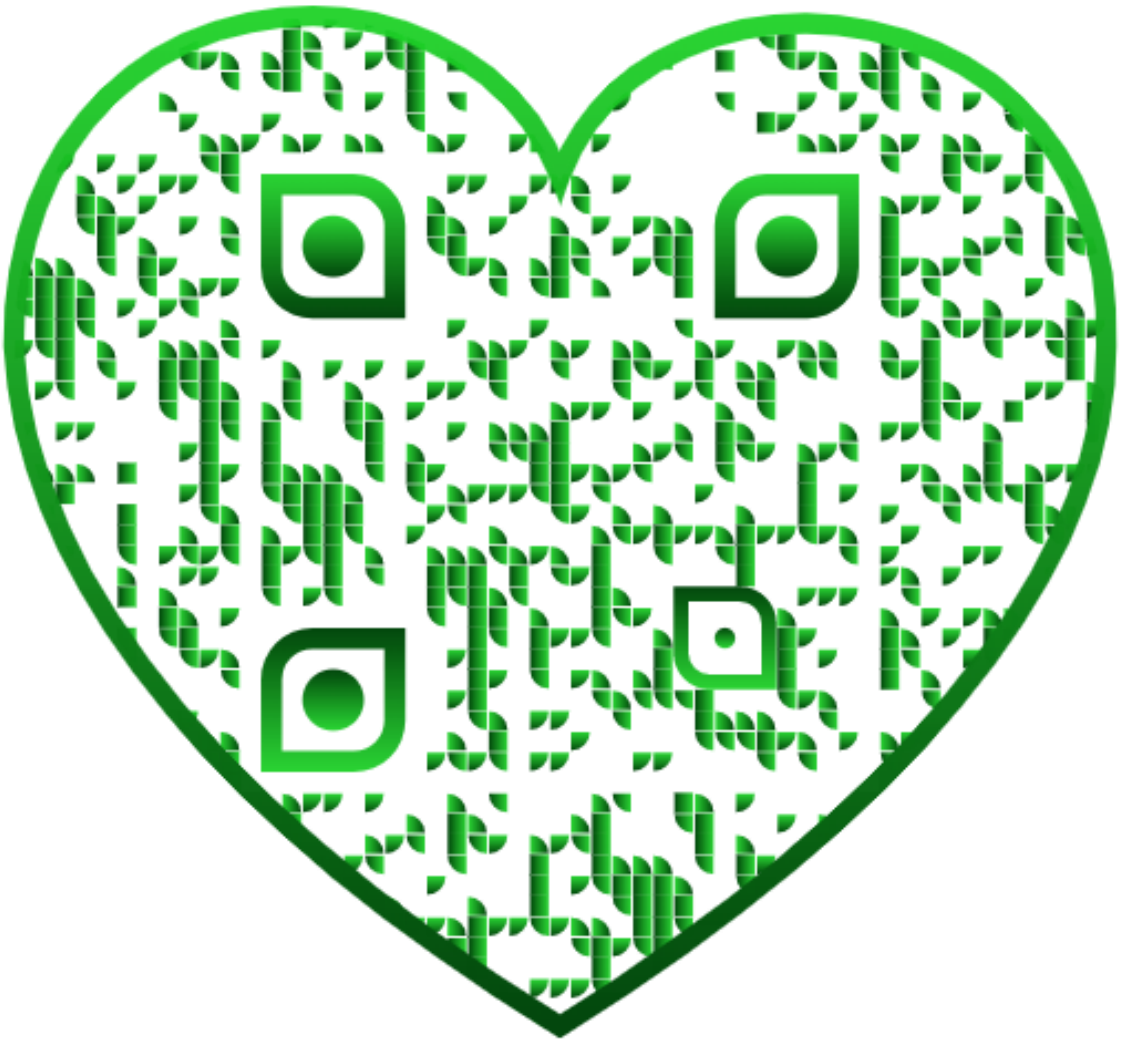
20 page special
The expansive world of The Fall

TOTALLY WIRE-D!

The Fall / No Home



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Cover illustration by Savage Pencil

The Masthead

Quality control does not work in music. There's no way to judge if a melody is correct, or if the harmonic potential of a song is being fulfilled. It would be like judging a painter for not using every part of the spectrum.

Take The Fall. The music of "Before The Moon Falls" is simple to the point of juvenile, not much more than two guitars and a bass clanging around each other in an oppressive loop. Then listen to the live version on YouTube from the Bungalow Bar in Paisley in 1981. The group's instruments stack up in a kaleidoscope of rough tunings and difference tones, the mottled harmonic hues a long way beyond simple major or minor keys. The stark melodic palette of the group throws up sudden pockets of resonance and beauty.

Tightness is a quality often valued in bands, but defining it is harder than just knowing it when you hear it. "Totally Wired", The Fall's 1980 single that we've named this issue after, is a ramshackle roller coaster ride along one chord, where the bass and drums chase each other around in ever-concentric circles. There are loose beats and fluffed notes, but they highlight how the group are rushing united together towards an infinite horizon.

The above might explain why some hear The Fall as a mundane mess, while others sense a universe inside. But the group – who this issue is dedicated to, on the occasion of ex-members House Of All's debut album – throw a wider light on what makes music worthwhile.

Any consideration of artistic worth has to get away from narrow measures of quality. A lesson I learned from whittling through 30-40 CDs that arrived at *The Wire* every day when I joined as Reviews Editor in 2007 was that adventurous and exciting music was rarely marked out by expertise, craft or finish – categories which you could in any case argue are socially constructed. The pieces of music which caught my ear or raised questions were those with startling contrasts or artistic choices buried inside. A piece of music is a nest of intentions and reactions, and it's the internal movements or relationships which create something special. If you focus instead on the external profile or overall feel of music, it places it in a cattle market of consumer products and rarely finds much of cultural worth.

Biba Kopf, writing in *The Wire* 177, captured something of the importance of intention and ambition in music when writing about Bob Dylan, a singer like Mark E Smith who can't be reduced to simple measures of good or bad: "The sound of the voice is remarkable: taut as a wire, spun whiplash tight and snapping back on itself the moment a line is unfurled."

Songs are nothing but games of anticipation and development. Just like a short story, elements of surprise and resolution can come from any angle. This is what lurks in The Fall, when you dig beneath the surface.

Derek Walmsley

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Thanks this issue Jill Pouncey

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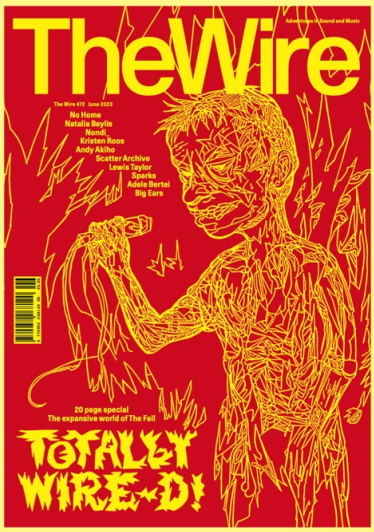

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Two bass drum hit: Louie Bellson

Percussion discussion

Coming across a discussion of Tito Puente's 1958 *Top Percussion* album in the midst of Phil Freeman's article on metal drummer Dave Lombardo was a highlight of the May issue [*The Wire* 471].

My own top percussion album is descended from Tito's, and, it seems, also has some significance for Dave Lombardo.

The personnel of the 1977 Pablo Records album *Ecué (Ritmos Cubanos)* includes Francisco Aguabella who played on *Top Percussion*. More to the point, it is co-credited to Cuban percussionist Walfredo De Los Reyes and Louie Bellson, the Italian-American jazz drummer credited with pioneering the use of double bass drums, an instrumentation which Lombardo seems to have built his whole technique and career on.

In the 1960s, Bellson was a member of the Duke Ellington Orchestra that performed the first *Concert Of Sacred Music*, which Ellington regarded as his most significant work, and in which he deployed Bellson's double bass drums to represent the thunder of creation. So I note with some amusement that more than once Phil Freeman describes Lombardo's double bass drum playing as like thunder, albeit in contexts which I suspect the Duke and Louie would regard as sacriligous rather than sacred.

Nathan West, Manchester, UK

Cross sections

Hello from Chicago, newish reader, oldish guy, an American who grew up in London and still mourns the death of *Melody Maker*, an old friend, because it covered everything – rock, jazz, folk, world music – great writing, and thus your journal reminds me of it, it being a great educator into new music.

Obviously, music having diversified considerably in 50 years, your journal is even better, as music journalism has evolved given the vocabulary and history borne of time. I love the mix of works your journal covers, totally reflecting my own constant search for what is sublime (even if one's finds end up usually just very good – as a kid, I started collecting anything glam, but then when glam ended I bought punk, jazz, classical, soul and prog all at the same time).

So I'm enjoying it and will keep subscribing. In fact, I use the reviews to buy 15 new albums a month by people I've never heard of, and have never been disappointed, even if the purchases are not always stellar, but clearly you are all trying to bring quality sounds to your readers' attention. You're doing a great job.

One question that's been bothering OCD me: while I understand the divisions in styles of reviewed releases under the heading The Columns, what is the prior section Soundcheck A–Z for? Both sections contain reviews of new music – the only difference dummy me can spot is that Soundcheck reviews are longer because the writers consider those artists of 'higher calibre' or of 'more newsworthy interest'? Please explain the two categories to put me out of my misery (nonviolently).

Yours with gratitude for the work of art that your journal really is.

Danny Vocal, Chicago, US

Thanks for the query. The Soundcheck A-Z consists of in-depth reviews of releases across numerous genres, intended to give a simultaneously broad and detailed impression of new developments and continuity in the world(s) of experimental music. The Columns are round-ups focusing on specific areas of music, employing the knowledge and expertise of writers who specialise in those areas. – JS

Redesign redux

Congratulations on the April and May issues [*The Wire* 470 and 471]. Like Manuel Optigram [Letters, issue 470], I was perplexed and left a bit bereft by the austerity of the March issue reformatting and redesign [issue 469]. What have they done to my favourite music magazine?! But obviously that issue was just a case of bedding in the new system, because first the April and now the new May issue both look fantastic! The layouts of the main articles are cool but also fun – loved the photos of the turntablists' nails and the curving headlines [issue 470] – and the review sections feel less cold and sterile (as Manuel said) more full and vibrant. To be honest I'm not sure what you have done to make it so, but I'm glad you have. Somehow the new layout now *feels* like *The Wire*, if you know what I mean. Bravo!

Michael Williams, via email

Longtime reader: first communication. On new design: wasn't feeling the first issue [*The Wire* 469]. Just received Dave Lombardo copy [issue 471]. Looks good. Photograph selection really great. And pages 32–39 excellent. But: words too close to edge of page. Sort that: but don't lose word count. And don't go too *Ray Gun* with fonts.

Syed Ahmed, via email

As a longtime reader of your magazine (subscriber since 1993), I am mighty happy that you are still going strong and that your publication is still available in printed format. Having said that, your new(ish) design and layout is really remarkably ugly. Well, tastes differ and I congratulate you for taking risks ;-), but I really hope that we will not have to wait long for the next revision. In particular, I hate the new format, which in combination with the small upper margin makes it difficult to read the magazine when holding it in your hands.

Nevermind, I love *The Wire*! Keep on the great work!!

Karsten Gareis, Bonn, Germany

Velvets revolver

I just wanted to point out that Laura Ortman was talking about Steve Gunn and not "Steve Gorn" in this month's Invisible Jukebox [*The Wire* 471]. She was referencing an upcoming show this September at the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh by Steve Gunn & Friends that includes Laura, Alan Licht, Ryan Sawyer and others who will be performing the *Velvet Underground & Nico* album to close out the museum's Velvets exhibition.

Michael Slaboch, via email

Corrections

Issue 471. In Once Upon a Time in San Diego, a racial slur uttered from the stage at a 1988 show by The Vandals was incorrectly attributed to singer Steve 'Stevo' Jensen. Apologies. In Soundcheck, Shannon Ketch was the vocalist on the title track of Sunburned Hand Of The Man's *Hypnotape*, not Conrad Capistran.

We welcome letters from readers. Write to us at letters@thewire.co.uk. Letters may be edited.

Brian Foskett/© National Jazz Archive/mptvimages.com

Sabrina Bellaouel
Al Hadr

On 'Al Hadr', Sabrina Bellaouel taps into myriad influences: from spirituality, astrology to club culture, romance, the body and self-love. Creating a balance between places, identities and sounds is a huge part of its charm.

[...] a work of art that pays no mind to the constraints the world imposes on women.' **Crack Magazine**

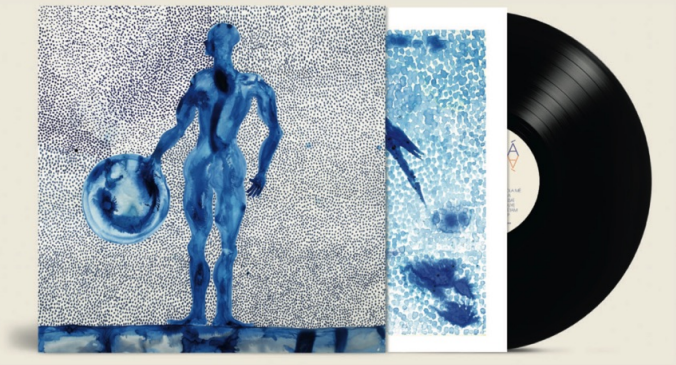
First album released in March
InFiné

Lucie Antunes
Carnaval

An album largely DIY in nature, embroidered with pieces using her voice, her virtuoso percussion, loops of vocal snippets, and electro sounds that vibrate under the skin.

'A «Carnaval» in the POP sense.' **Liberation**

New album released in April
InFiné & Cry Baby



Blick Bassy
Madiba

Twelve songs in the form of fables, dedicated to the theme of water

[...] One of Africa's most inventive and distinctive singer-songwriters.' **Guardian**

New album in May
InFiné & Othantiq AA

Rone
Looping

Rone breathes orchestral life in his compositions.

'Rone break the codes with the orcheshtre National de Lyon' **France Culture**

New album in June
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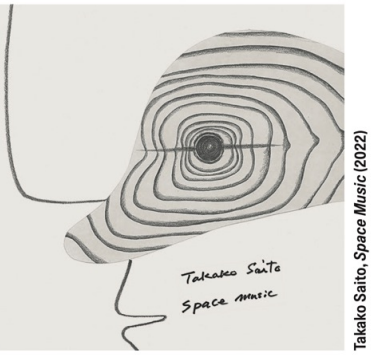
Unlimited Editions: Edition Telemark

A small run, analogue only sound art imprint has stealthily become a beacon for the outer reaches of weird sonics

By Peter Margasak

Norbert Eisbrenner, *Norbert Eisbrenner* (2022)



Takako Saito, *Space Music* (2022)

For much of his life Alexander Meyer had been content as a collector of sound art recordings, an interest that stemmed from his love of bands like The Velvet Underground and Can. A decade ago, he heard about an obscure German sound artist named Hans Essel, and was knocked out by some sound samples on the artist's website. He was surprised to learn that none of Essel's sound work had ever been released, a realisation that suddenly pushed Meyer to start a label. "It was something he did in his spare time," says Meyer. "I thought, this guy's amazing – somebody has to put out something. And then I thought, why don't I do it myself?"

He reached out to Essel, who admitted that he'd never thought about making a record, and the two novices proved a good match. Meyer asked Daniel Löwenbrück of experimental Berlin music shop Rumpsti Pumsti and the Tochnit Aleph label for some basic advice, and launched Edition Telemark in 2013 with the belated debut recording from Essel, then 65, *Saitensack* – named for the violin and viola technique he'd developed, built around subtle gradations of bow pressure. Although Meyer listened to far more than sound art "the label went in that direction because I felt there was more need there. There were many artists out there that had very few of their recordings released. What I wanted to do was to make LPs with a type of music that couldn't be heard before on LP."

The following year he attended the longrunning Festival for Experimental Music in Munich, where he encountered more unreleased artists, including Hans Rudolf Zeller. Additionally, he began writing to other figures he admired, such as the veteran Dutch sound artist Paul Panhuysen – founder and longtime director of Het Apollohuis, one of the most storied centres for sound installations in the world. He also partnered with Tochnit Aleph to release a recording by German Fluxus heavy Wolf Vostell. In one year Meyer found himself at the helm of one of the most promising imprints devoted to out sounds.

While 500 copies of the Vostell album were pressed, most items in Meyer's catalogue have come in runs of 200 or 300. None is available through Telemark digitally, as Meyer maintains a market strictly designed for vinyl collectors. He also shuns social media for the imprint, and has limited time or resources to support releases promotionally. So once an album is out, his work on a particular recording is finished. Nevertheless, he has helped raise the profile of still active artists, such as 89 year old German composer and pianist Ernstalbrecht Stiebler, while chronicling rare work from overlooked figures like composer Erhard Grosskopf or the late guitarist Norbert Eisbrenner, to say nothing of titles from Fluxus members like Takako Saito and Benjamin Patterson.

Between 2015–19 Meyer issued a volley of titles but things have slowed down in recent years. "It was going really well, so I've became a bit too open, too curious," he says. "I have quite a large waiting list. In the last few years, the production costs have skyrocketed." Yet he's got nearly a dozen titles in the pipeline or out now, including a forthcoming LP of an experimental jazz opera by the conceptualist drummer and improvisor Sven-Åke Johansson to be co-released with the Austrian imprint Trost. But from the beginning Meyer imposed limitations, including a numbering system for his catalogue that would conclude with 98 releases: the Editions Telemark project is now nearing a conclusion. ○

edition-telemark.de

Unofficial Channels: *The Deep Ark*

How serendipitous that The Arkitekt's *The Deep Ark* – an eight hour mix of ambient and IDM, largely from the mid-1990s, years in the making, with an accompanying book of photos and poems – arrives just a few months after Autechre's six hour *Artificial Intelligence – 1992 Contextual Mix*, released on 30 December 2022. They share a lot of prerogatives – and, it is worth noting, absolutely zero selections in common, or even much in terms of overall shape – but each mix is a very different creature. Call the Autechre set cause and *The Deep Ark* effect. The one billows into the other pretty impressively.

For a start, Autechre's set ambles, while the Arkitekt's is expansionist; each hour feels like its own fiefdom. From a long interview accompanying the project: "I threw everything I had at it, every trick or technique I'd picked up through the years." That's evident: on a project like this, the DJ's own edits of the tracks are what catch the ear, even when the ear isn't quite aware of it yet (certainly, that accompanying Q&A, over 6000 words long, did some heavy lifting for me here). When Aphex Twin's "Analogue Bubblebath" enters shortly after the 78 minute mark, it does so in steps: a few looped bars edited tightly to spread out the track's introductory drums before the synths arrive, more inevitable than heraldic. A similar process takes place when that track gives way in turn to Cylob's "Foid". The tendril-like riffs of the one neatly fold into the other's as it is, but the DJ's additions give it extra layers of crosshatching. The remixes, later on, of Björk's "All Is Full Of Love" by Zvuku (exclusive to the mix) and Funkstörung, are also a stroke – the twitchy-scritchy-itchy laptop-ness of it all.

Another quote from The Arkitekt's accompanying interview: "I have always felt that this music was under-represented by DJs. I spent about ten years playing electronica out on pirate radio and in the club and was always puzzled over the lack of DJs exploiting the genre." Oh, I don't know – maybe it simply wasn't as popular as straighter dance music? Just a thought. But there's something fittingly contemporary about this fuzzy stuff coming back into view. There's been a general revival of the soft and mellow in dance music of late, from young queer and trans DJs reclaiming pillowy ambient drum 'n' bass to old dudes like our auteur (and critic) here recalling what made stuff like this go – as music and as a long moment in time. You won't just fall asleep to it. ○

Michaelangelo Matos

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Transparent Double Vinyl Released 23 June

participant-uk.com

Nondi_

Fragmentary rhythms of juke connect with the producer's memories of local floods and historical rupture

By Neil Kulkarni
Photography by Ross Mantle

Flood City Trax is a collection of new music from Nondi_ aka Tatiana Triplin, a producer and composer from Johnstown Pennsylvania, and it has been inhabiting my headspace ever since I first heard it. It's a gauzy, beguiling suite of reflections on Triplin's home city of Johnstown, around 100 kilometres east of Pittsburgh, and the floods that have historically nearly swept it away. The album is the first release for Triplin on Planet Mu, after releasing a welter of her own footwork/nightcore music under various pseudonyms on her own label HRR. Though continuing the explorations of juke music threaded though her self-released *Loners Attitude* and *Rural Ghetto* EPs, it's a step beyond those projects. *Flood City Trax* cohesively holds together with a conceptual suggestiveness and emotional strength new to Nondi_'s work.

That reach of the music seemingly comes from Johnstown itself. "I was actually talking with my partner recently about how I don't think any of us can live anywhere other than Johnstown. When I was younger I hated it, I wished we were able to stay in Philly where I lived until I was ten. But that feeling of being here, having no control, and that constant tension that something is gonna go wrong – that's what Johnstown feels like. This town has shaped me. The city itself is really important to my music. And that's something I've only been realising recently. There hasn't been a flood in like 50 years, but there's always that feeling that the next one is going to come eventually."

The flood that hit Johnstown in 1889 was truly apocalyptic, causing a rolling mountain of debris to engulf the town, now mainly comprised of what was built above the rubble. Floods also hit the town in 1977 and memories of both deluges inform the sense of isolation and anxiety that suffuses Nondi_'s music.

"It affected my family – my family has stories about the '77 flood, my dad in particular has a story about almost getting swept away in it. In a small town, an event that kills over 100 people feels apocalyptic. And there's this other component – in the early history of Johnstown, in the 1920s, essentially all Black people were asked to leave the town who hadn't been residing there for seven years. There's this feeling in this town that those who come after the floods don't belong here, and there's still that feeling here that at any point, all of us could be swept away either by the environment, or industry, or politics."

Flood City Trax tightrope-walks those contradictory impulses of safety and danger, home and disconnection, solitude and community – this is music that's both danceable and deeply reflective, peppered with footwork/juke beats and tempos, prone to evanescence into gaseous whorls of smeared ambience and drift, sometimes as kinetic as DJ Rashad or DJ Nate, sometimes close to AR Kane and Dedekind Cut. That combination of soft and brittle, from dancefloor to outer space, emerged for Triplin as she compiled the LP.

"The tracks on *Flood City* started as a series of EPs in which I wanted to take the sound of old skool juke music but also wanted to make a more new age/ambient sound closer to Oneohtrix Point Never – a kind of vaporwave sound. These tracks started taking the shape of an album and became real when Planet Mu came to me. They kept ending up sounding dreamy and ambient, and as I went on, I realised I was making a really serious sounding album. It's completely changed my ideas about my music and where I want it to go."

Flood City Trax's shifting textures and genres reflect Nondi_'s changing process and increased seriousness. "I started the label as a challenge to myself and it became a place for myself and the sounds I like, a place to put out anything, with literally no standards, a totally free label. I didn't really care about alienating people for a long time, but with Planet Mu it felt like it was the first time where all the years of me practising has built into something – I approached it as what I believe a sound designer should be like, and created a truly conceptual album of ambient footwork. I want to expand my sound, it's made me feel that for once I should take a more careful approach to sound. But now, seeing how my music resonates with people, hearing it out in people's lives, it's changed everything."

Now she's working with international labels, does she see herself staying in Johnstown? "I'm starting a family here," she says. "Johnstown is where I got to be for now and I can count the number of times I've even left the state on one hand. I can't even comprehend the big club cities like New York and LA. But this feeds into how I see my music being used – I am always trying to make my tracks functional, danceable, make your body move, but what I realised on *Flood City Trax* is that I also like making music that is listening music, something that teaches, something where sure you can dance, but you can also observe. I'm fascinated by music that lets you inhabit both of those spaces."

For the dancers, and those watching them with an eye on the coming storm, this is unique, unsettling and yet strangely convivial music. Delight in its deluge. ○

Nondi_'s *Flood City Trax* is released by Planet Mu

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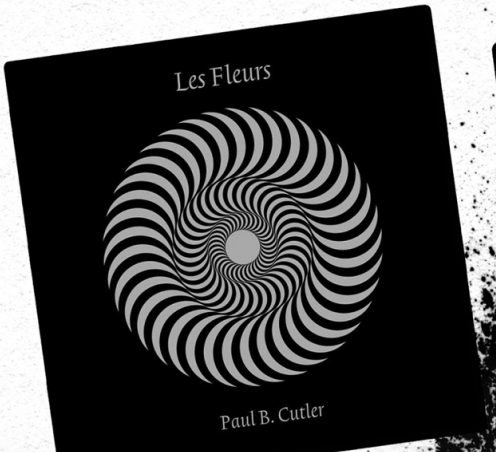

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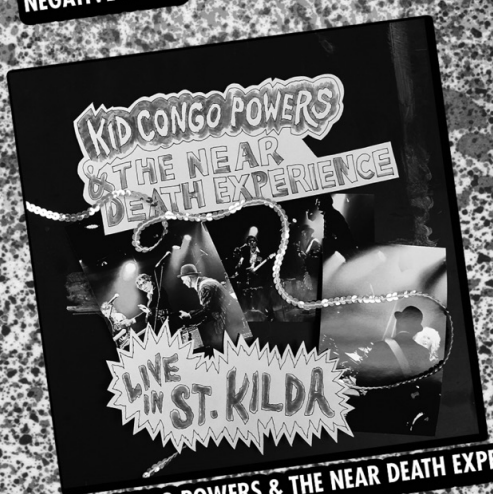

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Kristen Roos

The Vancouver based artist and composer embraces the limitations of early music-making software – including Laurie Spiegel's Music Mouse

By Robert Barry
Photography by Grady Mitchell

Kristen Roos was browsing eBay one day early in 2019 when he stumbled across a little piece of music history. It arrived in the post just a short while later: a three and a half inch floppy disk in a black plastic casing with a sticker on the upper half announcing "Dr T's Music Software" with a jaunty logo composed of two brightly coloured quavers and the musical symbol for a sharp note, like a hashtag. Underneath the branding, in neatly typed letters, the words "Music Mouse (UK) for Amiga. Copyright 1989 L Spiegel".

The composer Laurie Spiegel had first created the program for the Macintosh computer three years before that date in order to harness "the computer's ability to learn and to simulate aspects of our own human intelligence", as she wrote in a paper describing instructions for the Atari ST version a little later. Music Mouse, she claimed, would let "the computer grow into an actively participating extension of a musical person, rather than just another tape recorder or piece of erasable paper". For Roos, it opened up "a whole world".

Investigating that world led Roos down a path that saw him emailing with Spiegel herself, experimenting with different iterations of Music Mouse, trawling through old Yahoo Group listservs, finding other likeminded old programs with fantastical names like Diablo and MasterDrum, and ultimately releasing two of the most beguiling electronic albums of recent years: the quixotically titled *Universal Synthesizer Interface Vols I & II*.

But first of all, he had to find a way of actually making it work. "That was a whole process," he tells me, over a long Zoom call from his home in Vancouver. "When you start getting into old computers and trying to get programs working just off a floppy disk, then you realise there's actually finding the devices and the hardware. Each computer has its own unique way of using [a given program]. It might not have an operating system actually on it, you have to put the operating system on a disk and then..." He sighs, continuing, "Anyway..."

Today, Roos's studio offers something of a "history of computing", as he puts it. "I've got all these computers from different eras," he continues, listing a late 70s Apple II, an Atari ST, the Amiga he needed to run that disc of Music Mouse, a mid-80s Macintosh desktop. "And I also do music there. And then I've got the Jacquard loom." If it's programmable and has some sort of creative potential, it's probably spent time on Roos's eBay watchlist .

When he first started scouring the online auction sites, he was initially more interested in the potential of older machines for producing visual art. "I was really interested in that idea of computers and digital images entering the home," he explains. "Just because they're so commonplace now, on phones."

On his personal website, he maps out a media archaeological timeline running from the first light pen at MIT in 1959 through Dick Shoup's pioneering SuperPaint software at Xerox PARC in 1972, all the way up to more recent programs for capturing, digitising, and animating pictures, like MacVision and Deluxe Paint IV. "Deluxe Paint is like a little time capsule," he enthuses. "You can create really beautiful work just within that environment."

But the granddaddy of them all has to be the Jacquard loom. Patented in 1804, the world's first programmable loom was invented by a Lyon silk merchant named Joseph Marie Jacquard. Capable of weaving complex patterns based on information encoded in punched cards, it was the spark that lit the touchpaper of the digital revolution. Charles Babbage, inventor of the analytical engine, kept a woven portrait of Jacquard on his desk for inspiration.

The method of storing data in stacks of variously perforated cardboard chits was later adopted by player pianos and by the first IBM computers, nearly a century later. But the one Roos has is fed with the simple two dimensional bitmap files that have been a mainstay on Windows and OS computer operating systems since the 90s. With these simple pixellated, black and white graphics files, he has been able to produce textiles with complex geometric motifs, recalling the demoscene-era of early digital art: hypercubes and Minecraft-like faces, hallucinatory arrays of shimmering colour.

In a sense, the way Roos's loom is programmed is not that different from some of the old music software he found from the 80s and 90s. Diablo, for instance, created by Dutch programmer Frank Balde, allows you to specify sets of parameters like amplitude and pitch, then draw notes into a graphic grid to be read by the computer as MIDI information and output as looped sound patterns. Several of the tracks on *Universal Synthesizer Interface* even have a slightly Conlon Nancarrow-ish, pianola-like sound, full of dense hocketed textures and tinkling minimalist motifs. The program, he says, changed his approach to composition. "A lot of the decisions within the software I would never make with any other piece of software. I don't think I could create this music with any other piece of software."

But despite all the vintage gear, *Universal Synthesizer Interface* is not, Roos insists, a "nostalgia project". "I didn't grow up having computers at all as a child," he explains. "They were kind of unattainable, in a way, just because they were expensive." Even while studying for a BFA in electroacoustic music at Montreal's Concordia University in the mid-90s, he rarely used the college computers for his music – "I wanted more hands-on stuff" – and found them painfully slow the few times he did. "I wouldn't be doing what I do today if I had grown up with computers," he says. "They were portrayed in a different sort of way in the 80s – not really as something you create with."

But for Laurie Spiegel and other likeminded programmers, a computer was always something more than just a business machine – it was "an actively participating extension of a musical person". ○

Kristen Roos's *Universal Synthesizer Interface Vol II* is released by We Are Busy Bodies

NEW

ALL HANDS_MAKE LIGHT
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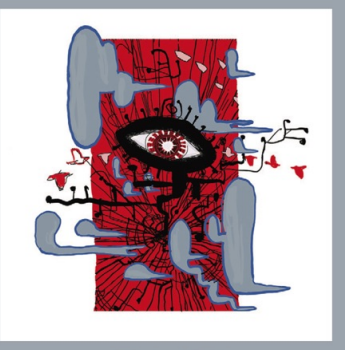

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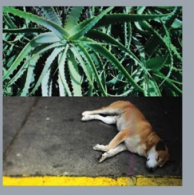

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Natalia Beylis

The sound artist works magical transformations from the watery sounds of rural Ireland and keyboards salvaged from a dump

By Brian Coney
Photography by Ruth Clinton

"You really get to know each farmer's tractor living here," declares Natalia Beylis. At an old farmhouse in the middle of a bog, she's reflecting on life in Ireland's least populated county. "In Leitrim, you know what time it is in the morning because of the birdsong," she adds. "You also know what time it is when you hear Aidan in his blue tractor or Bernie coming down the road in his little Massey Ferguson."

Across countless perfectly predictable days such as these, Kyiv born sound artist Beylis has emerged as one of Ireland's most perfectly unpredictable musicians. You need only dip into her sweeping solo catalogue to hear how the island's secluded northwest can – if you sit with it – function as a muse. "I left Ukraine before I was one, so I don't remember anything," she says. "But because I was raised in Baltimore, and have only lived in cities and suburbs since, I hadn't really engaged with the sound of nature as much. Now, I'm alone in nature so much. It's given me such an immersion in minute, individual sounds."

Shortly after moving to Leitrim 15 years ago, Beylis embraced a harsher immersion when she formed the group Woven Skull alongside her partner Willie Stewart and Aonghus McEvoy. Pushing the confines of repetition via free improvisation, they have long felt like the searing, expansive foil to Beylis's own increasingly fruitful explorations into domestic and interior soundworlds. This year alone, she has released two solo albums, *Library Sticks* and *Variations On A Sewing Machine*. The sewing machine used to make the latter caught fire during the recording process.

Zip back to 2013 and you'll stumble upon a conceptual genesis point for Beylis's allegiance to found sound and field recordings. Every day that year, she recorded two minutes of sounds from her daily life, resulting in a phonographic archive with regular recurring noises. She titled the project *The Sunken Hum*. "That year of spending two minutes every day of really just listening has definitely informed everything I've done since," she says. "It's been a way for me to get inside sound in a different way."

It feels fitting that one of her most sorcerous releases to date follows her recent collaborative album with Cork based cellist Eimear Reidy, *She Came Through The Window To Stand By The Door*, featuring hulking drones performed by Beylis on what is thought to be Ireland's second oldest organ. *Mermaids*, which will be released on Belfast imprint Touch Sensitive in September, is consonant with the prayerful, albeit unaccompanied ambience of *She Came Through The Window* and hits like a feature-length paean to Beylis's fondness for both the in between and stumbled upon.

"You're not supposed to take things, but the guy was off doing something else," she says regarding a trip to the recycling centre in Leitrim. "Among kettles and toasters, I spotted a beautiful electric keyboard, CRB Elettronica Ancona. If we hadn't gone there on that one day it would've been crushed and off to the landfill. I don't know if I believe in fate, but the cosmic elements of the universe definitely came together in a way to make it happen."

Destiny or not, the salvaged keyboard featured throughout *Mermaids* is the sound of homespun gossamer. Filtered through various effect pedals, widescreen motifs on peaks like "Afloat On Fog And Feathers" are submerged yet radiant, and complement the almost touchable closeness of field recordings from Beylis's archive, such as lapping water and the mournful cries of birds on "Good Birds, Goodnight". It creates an otherworld as sacramental as those of Ana Roxane, Green-House and Huerco S, but with a subaqueous quality all its own.

"A lot of the music was inspired by swimming in the River Shannon near my house," says Beylis. "I previously released a track before called "The Steadfast Starry Universe", which was about swimming there. It's murky and mostly dangerous but there are a few good spots. It all came together when I discovered an old family photo taken by my father. There was the murkiness and the idea of the underwater. I thought, this is it. I suddenly knew what all of the songs on the album were about."

It may be favourable to swimming, musical exploration and making, as Beylis puts it, a "racket without having neighbours around to complain" (see her other "peat-powered" project BB84 alongside Paddy Shine of Gnod and others) but the freedom of mostly operating out of rural Ireland is distinct from being isolated from the world beyond it. If anything, as a regular performer and participant at happenings, Beylis is a model for the vital spirit of an island-wise scene that makes records like *Mermaids* not just possible but, in their own way, genuinely special.

"Once upon a time, you could only really play in Dublin and Cork," says Beylis. "Now, experimental music is everywhere here. Dublin Digital Radio deserves singling out for bringing together so many different people across the country together without feeling like it's essential to move to Dublin to participate. And because the scene is still kind of small in this wonderful way where it's not broken up into genres, there is just so much more cross-pollination.

"But I do feel at home in Leitrim," she reflects. "A lot of the land around here has been called marginal land because it's never been great for large-scale farming. You get that feeling from all the hedgerows everywhere. We have a lot more space and a lot more things left wild. It all adds to a feeling of magic." ○

Natalia Beylis's *Library Of Sticks* and Beylis & Eimear Reidy's *She Came Through The Window To Stand By The Door* are released via Bandcamp

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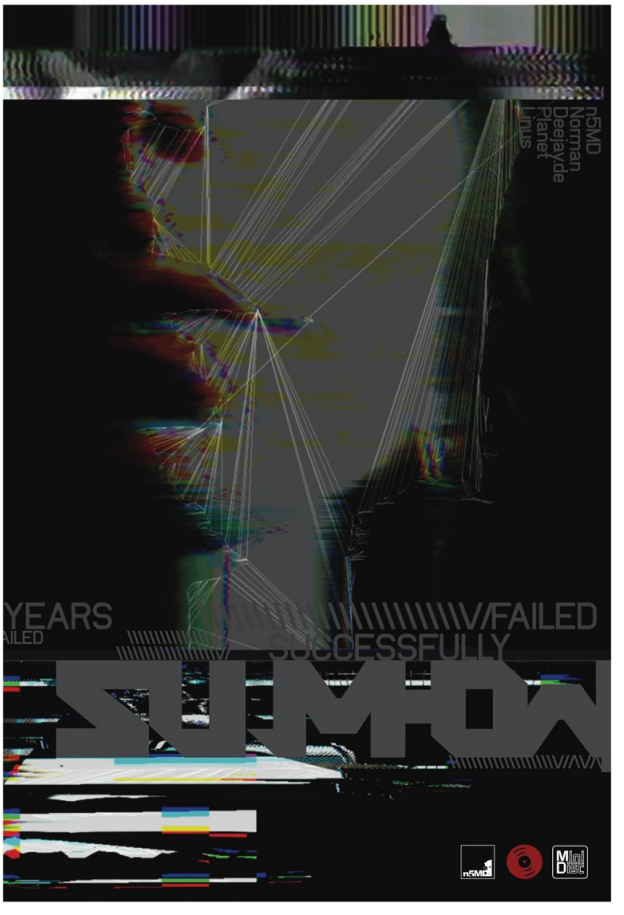

Andy Akiho

The US composer has graduated from concertos for ping pong players and Bruce Lee to music for steel pans and symphonic works utilising outsized sculptures

By Kurt Gottschalk
Photography by Clayton Cotterell

Through Beethoven, Puccini and Mozart, through the whole first half of the Omaha Symphony concert at Nebraska's Holland Performing Arts Center on 17 March, a large head stood at the rear of the stage, dominating the setting. Immaculate in gold but alternately lit in blue and red, the head awaited composer/percussionist Andy Akiho's arrival with a Zen-like patience.

The head, or Dango, is the work of the Japanese born sculptor Jun Kaneko, a longtime Nebraska resident who suggested Akiho be asked to compose a new piece for a concert honouring Kaneko's artworks (the sculptor had previously done set and costume design for the operas excerpted for the first half of the programme). Akiho was commissioned to write music in response to the large sculptures but during one of his early visits to Kaneko's Omaha studio, his curiosity got the better of him and *Sculptures* came into focus. Striking one and liking the sound, he ended up writing symphonic music that used Kaneko's works – some too big to bring into the large hall and presented instead on video – as instruments.

Akiho is a composer of surprising breadth. He wrote a percussion quartet for Colin Currie, a concerto for ping pong players and another in honour of kung fu star Bruce Lee. Complex and layered rhythms permeate his work, even when composed for strings. Along with the sonic possibilities discovered in Kaneko's creations, *Sculptures* makes use of chromatic gongs, metal plates, glockenspiel, celeste and prepared piano, along with the traditional elements of a large orchestra.

He talks about orchestral timbres and contrapuntal sections in *Sculptures*, but there's also pulse. One section uses what he refers to as "off by one rhythmic patterns", a recurring device in his music: a long, repeating phrase is juxtaposed with a melody in a different count in what he describes as "a pattern that breaks.

"You just keep cycling through them like an ostinato over and over and the melody goes over that in quarter notes," he continues, finding time to talk in an empty banquet hall the morning between the two Omaha concerts. He's affable and easy-going in conversation, with a confident humility and engaging energy that gives him a bit of an Anthony Perkins vibe.

Polyrhythms came with studying the steel pan. Following the second night's performance, Akiho played a short set on pan in a trio with cello and drums. The set included *Karakurenai* (*Crimson*), built around the off by one rhythms – a sort of decoder ring for much of his work. A flexible piece for open instrumentation, it relies heavily on keeping count when other instruments are playing different patterns. "The journey to get there can be hard if you've never done anything like that before," he says. "But the more people you add, it gets exponentially easier."

Sculptures is Akiho's first major work since 2021's *7 Pillars*, written for the Brooklyn, New York based Sandbox Percussion ensemble. It's a striking piece both musically and visually, with the players moving illuminated tubes around an otherwise dark stage, calling attention to different instruments within the large assemblage onstage. Sandbox have presented the piece more than two dozen times in the 18 months since its premiere.

"This piece is special," says Sandbox's Ian Rosenbaum, who met Akiho in 2009 when they were both studying at Yale. "It really represents a kind of sea change in the percussion repertoire. Andy spent years developing the architecture of the piece, how the waves interact. Someday somebody is going to write a dissertation about it."

Born in South Carolina in 1979, Akiho discovered the steel pan while studying at the University of South Carolina. His passion took him to Trinidad and then New York, where he became a part of the city's vibrant pan community while trying to make a name as a jazz pan player. He devoted himself to transcribing Sonny Rollins and Miles Davis for pan but never found his own voice in the tradition.

"If I'm trying to play a bebop tune, a standard or even a blues and I'm not bringing it to that level of someone I really respect, I'd rather just hear them do it," he says. "But when I'm composing my own music, that feels like my most honest version of me, even more than speaking."

Caribbean styles also remain buried in his syntax. "When I went to Trinidad, I was deeply immersed... I would hang out in the yards all day and just play with the guys. That has seeped into my composition. But I'm never like, I'm going to write a calypso part. A lot of times when people do that, it feels fake."

He still improvises on pan for hours at a time, and "if something sticks, I'll think, OK, that's something I want to hear over and over. It's the most inefficient way ever."

The traditions Akiho studied may not be obvious in his post-minimalist grooves, but the feeling is there, more inherent than studied. "I'm not a good enough ethnomusicologist kind of person", he concludes. "I just go and do." ○

andyakiho.com

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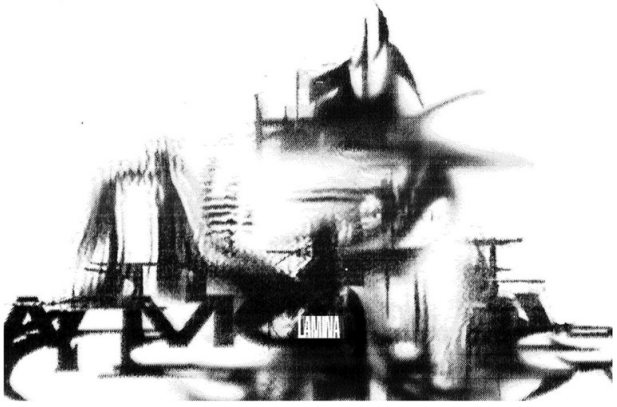

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Global Ear: Oakland

The East Bay underground is stepping up its resistance to the deadening effects of property development

By Collin Smith

Non Plus Temps: (from left) Michael Zamora, Amber Sermeno, Sam Lefebvre, Oli Lipton, Andy Human, Stan Martinez

Sam Lefebvre asks to meet at Starbucks in Jack London, a waterfront enclave of upscale shops and restaurants just south of downtown Oakland. He gestures to a nearby two-storey building emblazoned with a property developer's purple logo. "Preening started in this huge warehouse," he says, referring to the group he formed with Max Nordile and Alejandra Alcala in 2016. At the time Lefebvre, a writer and musician, was also living in the building's collective artist space whose fate was emblematic of the forces that have shaped Oakland's music scene over the past decade.

Oakland has not traditionally been a go-to location for commercially oriented artists, who tend to gravitate towards New York or Los Angeles. This has allowed the area to develop a grounded DIY sensibility that has provided fertile ground for out of the box musical experimentation.

Preening were representative of this ethos. The three-piece combined anchored basslines with wild saxophone melodies and Beefheart-esque lyricism to create a style that felt compellingly spontaneous, channelling the fast-burning brilliance of a backyard fireworks display. Their music was informed by the improvising aesthetic that underlay the scene Preening grew out of. "It was all very much invented in the moment," says Nordile.

Before they disbanded in 2020, Preening spanned a particularly turbulent period for Oakland's music community, bookended by the global pandemic and the Ghost Ship warehouse fire, where an artist residence and performance space in East Oakland went up in flames during an underground concert, killing 36 people in 2016. The tragedy was swiftly followed by a city-orchestrated crackdown on similar artist spaces. "People used that as an excuse to come down on a lot of DIY spaces in different cities under the pretence of concern for people in those spaces," declares Alcala. Lefebvre agrees. Calling the government's actions a "witch hunt", he contextualises it in the broader struggle between artists and propertied interests: "The character of music scenes has a lot to do with the balance of forces, the balance of class power, at a given moment between tenants and landlords."

During the post-Ghost Ship period, Lefebvre notes that the Oakland scene lost ground to opportunistic real estate developers that took advantage of the fallout from this crackdown. Lefebvre was evicted from his own practice space a couple of months after the fire.

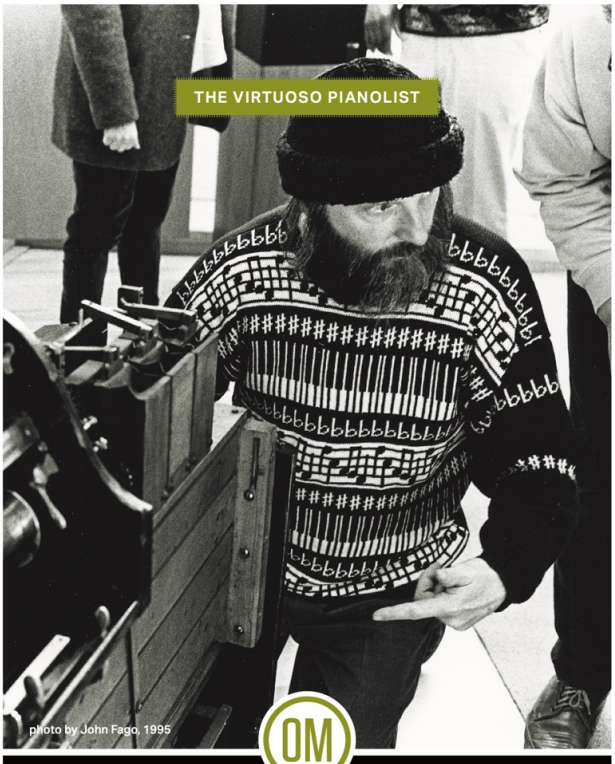
Preening were the kind of group who could thrive in the ad hoc performance spaces that were left behind. "I think the conditions of the scene at the time really produced, or were reflected in, the nuts and bolts of that band," Lefebvre notes. "It was a band sort of developed to be lean and agile, and able to play in these kinds of DIY settings."

In the wake of Ghost Ship, minimalism was as much a survival tactic as an artistic choice. The crackdowns by the authorities compounded pressures from gentrification that had been growing in the Bay since the area became a hub for the tech industry. But the Oakland scene has not lost pace. Alcala continues to play bass in the bands Blues Lawyer and Naked Roommate, while Lefebvre linked up with prolific Oakland musician Andy Jordan/Andy Human to form Non Plus Temps. Featuring members from other standout Oakland outfits like The World and Famous Mammals, Non Plus Temps revive some of the less remembered stylistic touches of classic post-punk bands, eschewing spiky guitar attacks in favour of dub-laden atmospherics inspired by labels like On-U Sound.

The creation of Non Plus Temps around the time of the pandemic coincided with a new shift in Bay Area tenant/landlord power dynamics, where extreme circumstances strengthened residents' efforts to organise for their interests via tenant unions and other forms of collective action. In addition to providing much needed relief for the city's residents, this renewed tenant militancy created new conditions of possibility for Oakland's artists. Lefebvre was able to renegotiate his rent with his new landlord and Jordan went on rent strike completely, providing a degree of financial breathing room that helped them develop Non Plus Temps' debut album *Desire Choir*.

But these changes, while significant, haven't erased the losses from the last ten years. Lefebvre's old home is still a real estate company HQ; Nordile is still in Olympia; Preening are still on hiatus. Yet Oakland's music scene remains as dynamic as ever, finding its own way to flourish in a place where existence and resistance are almost synonymous. "People are tenacious," Alcala tells me matter of factly. "As long as there's a will, they're gonna make a way." ○

Katie Beataa Bryan



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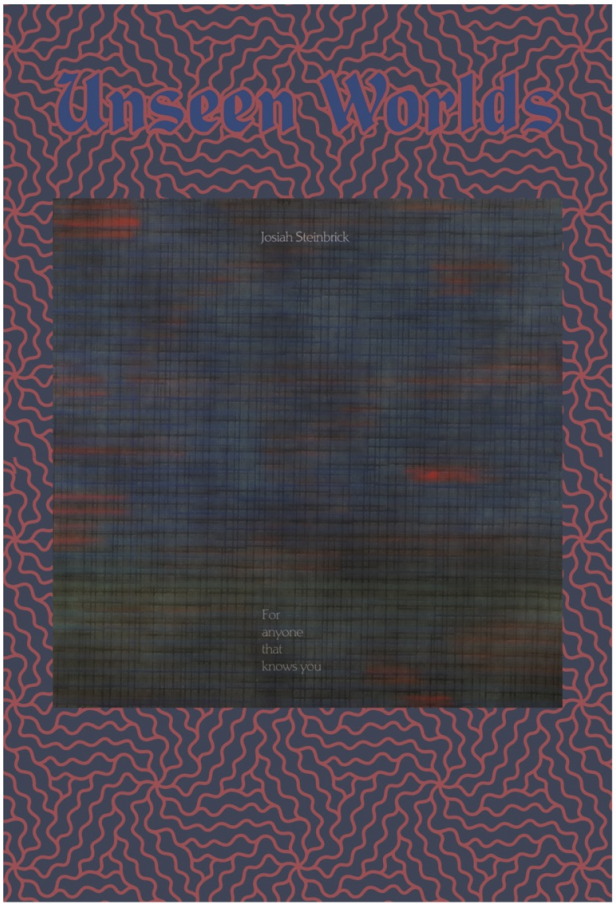

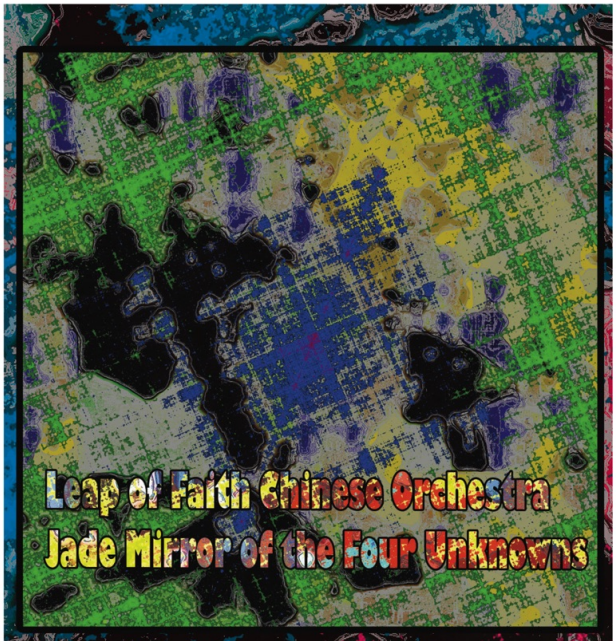

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This month's artwork selected by DJ Scotch Egg
Album design by Thomas E Martin

Faust
You Know Faust
Klangbad 1996

I remember the CD so clearly. It looked weird. A plastic printed transparency bore the simplest typography. Rather than a booklet, we are confronted with an abstract statement: "You Know Faust". Do I know Faust? What is Faust? A single red triangle with an X-ray'd fist dropped the only clue as to what might lie encoded on the plain white disc.

In an era defined by subcultural identities and their associated characters, this minimalism was an affront. It was puzzling. It simply didn't follow the industry standard. There was no booklet here, no band photos, no lyrics. On the back, a tracklisting gives a small taste of what's to come, with every "Pause" timed and listed alongside the album's main tracks and numerous interludes.

You can't imagine what kind of music is inside, and in fact, even when you listen, it kind of defies description or classification. On the album's opening track "Hurricane", detuned guitars swirl in primal repetition, a tranced-out industrial haze, swiftly followed by a 15 second field recording of someone running through a barn. Then it's time to relax to the dreamy soundscape of "C Pluus". Every song has a different vibe. It's a trip, but one that speaks to the agnostic, the intangible, とらわれない. It subverts the industry's aspiration to categorise everything.

At the time I had no concept of field recording, no knowledge of experimental music as such. This album opened me up to realise that music didn't have to be 'music' but could be many things. It can be comprised of any sound, and instruments can come in any form, chainsaws, cement mixers... It was this sense of freedom, this purity of expression that drew me into their world.

Later, in 1997, I saw them play a concert in Tokyo's Liquid Room that changed my understanding of music forever. Masonna opened, naked on stage accompanied only by harsh noise and feedback, lassoing a microphone alarmingly into the audience in a performance that lasted perhaps 30 seconds at most. Omoide Hatoba, the band of Boredoms guitarist Seiichi Yamamoto, played next, followed by Gong. It was a legendary line-up.

As Faust took to the stage, the room filled with smoke so thick it felt impossible to breathe, let alone see. Zappi Diermaier's drumming was hypnotic. His hybrid kit incorporated various industrial machines and items that were impossible to identify. The sound was enormous. It was physical. This was about more than music, it was an assault on the body, mighty in its intensity. As a teenager, it felt dangerous and confusing, like you weren't really sure if it was OK to be there or not. Had there been an accident? Was there supposed to be this much smoke? But the music carried on.

If people don't understand something, they start to get uncomfortable. It's up to you if you open yourself up to it or not. This concert was an experience unlike any other I had ever been to before. It was not just watching or listening to music. It surpassed a certain level of human cognition to become something else. It cannot be defined well by words, or imagery, and it does not try to do so. You just have to be there.

And the same goes for this cover art. Faust don't confine your understanding of the music. They don't try to tell you what to think or how to receive the album. It's just there, in the most minimal way possible: you know, Faust. ○

DJ Scotch Egg aka Scotch Rolex aka Shigeru Ishihara is a musician based in Berlin. Shackleton & Scotch Rolex's *Death By Tickling* is released by Silver Triplet

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13 April
Phil England played tracks by Paul St Hilaire, Negativland, Lindstrøm remixed by EYE, Jasdeep Singh Degun, and more

6 April
Meg Woof played tracks by Pat Thomas, "A" Trio & Alan Bishop, Dorothy Moskowitz & The United States Of Alchemy, Gerald Cleaver, and more.

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Rory Salter (Maggiore & Le Du); Johnny Grieg (Sakamoto); Sam Hutchinson (Lombardo); Clare Hewitt (Dunmall); Meghan Daniels (Angel-Ho); Nicholas Albrecht (Moskowitz)

Coming next month: the July issue of *The Wire*

473

Online at exacteditions.com from

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On sale in shops from

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Invisible Jukebox: No Home

Each month we play an artist or group a series of records which they are asked to comment on – with no prior knowledge of what they are about to hear

Tested by Meg Woof
Photography by Jessica Gianelli

No Home is the dynamic solo DIY noise project of East Londoner Charlie Valentine. As a one person punk and grunge outfit they have self-released several singles and EPs, the first dating back to 2016. Their debut album *Fucking Hell* appeared in 2020 during lockdown, and their second, *Young Professional*, at the end of 2022. Both of them concept albums, they pose questions about late stage capitalism, morality and the future of the environment through their often dark, allegorical, fantasy-tinged narratives and experimental song structures, which combine programmed percussion with distorted guitar and Valentine's formidable soulful voice.

Although they most often work alone, in 2022 they collaborated on the title track of US industrial artist Sasami's album *Squeeze*. A regular performer on the UK experimental punk circuit and beyond, Valentine has previously appeared at festivals such as Birmingham's Supersonic and shared bills with experimental artists such as Ale Hop and Space Afrika. Notably, they've self-organised their own shows, delivering the official album launch for *Young Professional* at South London venue Spanners earlier this year.

No Home recently appeared on the compilation *Utopia Or Oblivion*, for which a selection of artists were asked to respond to R Buckminster Fuller's essays of the same name – a fitting challenge for an artist whose music grapples with conflicting feelings and ideas, and their attempt to find a middle ground through sound.

The jukebox took place in South London.

Crass
"What The Fuck?"
From *Penis Envy* (Crass) 1981

NH At first it sounded like [Canadian horrorcore rapper and producer] Backxwash, and now it sounds like a conference hall.

MW **This track goes through a few different movements.**

NH American artist or British artist?

MW **It's a British group.**

NH I love that there's three songs in one, and they've squashed a lot of different ideas together, I do that a bit as well.

MW **Yes, that storytelling structure. This is "What The Fuck?" by UK anarcho punk band Crass from their 1981 feminist album *Penis Envy*. I wanted to start with this one because Crass were a completely DIY outfit. You've always self-released and self-managed, and you self-organise gigs – how important is that to the No Home project?**

NH It's quite important because it means I can decide things like, I'm going to release something tomorrow. I'm a goal-oriented person and I don't really run by anyone else's time. I have this relationship with my work now where I've got to the point where I know what I'm doing and working on someone else's timeline would be difficult because it would never be representative of the ideas that I want to express in that moment. It'd be some weird, watered down mutant version, not the real fully fleshed ideas.

MW **So you like the freedom that being a DIY musician allows. For Crass being autonomous was political and anti-establishment as well. Is it for you, too?**

NH It's me saying what I want to say, no dilution. No one's adding water to my Ribena!

MW **The themes in your songwriting are often surreal with a political edge. *Young Professional* tells the story of a young employee struggling with a search for meaning, who eventually turns into a tree...**

NH Yeah, as I've grown older, this sense of disillusionment has grown. You get the really good job, and then what? If you don't want to live a certain kind of way, then where do you go, where's the up from there? I talk about being half ambitious, half slacker. I wanted to make this slacker record but also wanted to really go for it and try to reach my potential... then I'll tell myself: stop being ambitious, stop the madness! So there's those themes [of inner conflict] and then there's also wider ecological themes.

When I'm thinking about ambition in *Young Professional*, it relates to environmental ideas. I'm asking, what is there to be ambitious about when so many resources are running out? If you keep going, who pays the price? The way that it goes in the album is that you join this cult of ideas and the cult ends up being really unhealthy, it ends up being cannibalistic. Human beings can eat each other's ideas and it's quite brutal. That's what I was thinking about when I wrote "The Feast" – it's this Bonfire Night-esque guitar eternity song that's like the end of a horror movie.

Coil
"Fire Of The Mind"
From *The Ape Of Naples* (Threshold House) 2005

NH This reminds me of "Rocket's Tail" by Kate Bush, from the end of *The Sensual World*.

MW **This is a track from *The Ape Of Naples* by Coil, a group who explored and communed with the supernatural through their music. What do you like about combining real world and supernatural themes in your writing?**

NH I'm not obsessed with fantasy but it's always there at the back of my mind, because you can just keep going with it, and going and going, and it's eternal.

MW **When your tracks are dealing with dark psychological themes, do you use sonic devices to create a dark or unsettling atmosphere?**

NH I suppose I use lo-fi sounds to replicate the industrial themes – "Owner Of The Leash" [from *Young Professional*] reminds me of cars, for example – and rain sounds and echo to make it sound like forest surroundings. When I couldn't find drums I went to the park and started recording twigs. At first I didn't like it but I worked on it until I did, and then it started

Charlie Valentine aka No Home in Whitechapel, London, April 2023

to sound like the human mouth. Even though you think the supernatural is far away, it comes from the human brain. Horror movies are about our own deepest fears, and so what does that say about us?

MW Are you interested in capturing more optimistic sounds too?

NH Yeah, because otherwise the album becomes one note, monotonous. It's like having 12 different breeds of dogs, and you have to satisfy them all! You have to pay attention to every mood. And in terms of my musical influences as well, I don't just have one.

Space Afrika
"Lose You Beau"
From *Honest Labour* (Dais) 2021

NH I've heard this song before, but I don't know what it is!

MW It's by ambient duo Space Afrika. There's a track on *Young Professional* mixed by Space Afrika's Joshua Inyang, and it's mastered by Rainy Miller, who's part of that same Manchester electronic music scene. What do you like about their production?

NH I mean, I never really listen to ambient music, but we played a show together last year, and actually it sort of made sense. When they play live, they take the air out of the room, people start crying... it's really interesting, they have such sensibility and such a handle on sound that they can work your emotions in that sort of way, even if it's a collage of sounds. With the mastering, a friend suggested I talk to Rainy. Here as well there was an example of the slacker versus the ambitious person. The slacker in me would have not mastered the album, but I thought, let's try it. It was a nice relationship because I sent half the album before it was all done, and Rainy was totally cool with it – I was like, welcome to my world of madness!

MW I can imagine that live bill working well. What was it about it that worked for you?

NH Well, sometimes I consider myself a noise artist and I guess ambient music has a spectrum. I think noise music meets in the middle.

MW Space Afrika are influenced by their urban surroundings, I've seen them performing with grainy visuals of Manchester city centre above the stage. Does your own experience of living in a city seep into your music too?

NH Yeah, 100 per cent. During the pandemic, I was listening to the radio so much. Though I would normally listen to rock music, at that time I couldn't, and I was suddenly reintroduced to jungle and techno. I'd be listening to jungle every morning and it brought me back to when I was a child hearing jungle coming from my sibling's room. Jungle is the sound of a city, and it's industrial music as well.

It's hard to explain but the city does always define me. Sometimes I hear a song and I'll understand why someone made that song, because it sounds or feels like London. Other times you hear a track and it doesn't feel right, because someone's made it in their own bubble but while living in the city, where there are a thousand genres converging.

Derek Bailey
"Upper Clapton Nocturne"
From *Domestic Jungle* (Scatter Archive) 2022

NH This is my kind of chaos!

MW This links to what you were just saying about listening to jungle on the radio...

NH ...with two tabs open at once!

MW Here, a guitarist is listening to the radio and improvising with it.

NH Who is this?

MW Derek Bailey. It was recorded in the 1990s but rereleased online last year. I wondered how much of your guitar playing is improvised, do you enjoy playing that way?

NH During the pandemic I really didn't want to hear guitar. Being by myself, everything started to sound like one tone. I really I had to redefine my relationship with guitar and twist it around in the months that lockdown finished. Now, when I perform, I'm so much more relaxed that I can extend guitar parts and feel like I can do what I want. That's also why I made the track "The Feast", basically so that I could do whatever I want for five minutes [when performing]. I made the album in a way that allowed myself even more space for experimentation. When you do something different every single time you perform, you can ask, does that work? And then the next time you want to make something you know what does and doesn't.

MW When did you first pick up the guitar?

NH I think I started playing ten, 12 years ago? I'm not the best player, but if I have something in my head, I'll find a way to express it. I saw a Sonic Youth performance of "100%" on YouTube recently and Thurston [Moore] was lashing the guitar strap down on the strings. I wouldn't necessarily do that, but something like that makes me think about [other ways] I can make a sound longer, larger. You might not want to achieve a Jaco Pastorius level of proficiency, but you still want to make it interesting for yourself. Anyone can play guitar but it's good to ask yourself how you want to play it, as an individual.

MW Was there a specific genre of music that inspired you to start with the instrument?

NH Probably pop punk, some popular rock. I did put it down for a bit, but I came back to it when I started to ask more questions about songwriting. Now, the root of everything for me is knowing how I want a song to sound, and then figuring out how to play it and make it sound that way.

Cold Comfort
"Holy Channel"
From *All Power No Sour* (Bandcamp) 2023

MW This is a fairly new one on me too, but I wanted to play it because of the set-up involved. This is Cold Comfort, a one person rock band from the North West of England. Can you tell that this is made by a solo artist?

NH No, this sounds like a big indie rock band – or like Linkin Park or something!

MW Yes, perhaps that's their intention here, creating the illusion of a band. How do you find working as a one person bedroom rock outfit?

NH It actually wasn't that I liked working that way, it was that I couldn't find anyone to play with me and then I thought, fuck it, I'm just going to do it. And the more I did it, the better I got at it. Now I have a bit of an issue wondering if I could let people in, but I think that will pass in the next year. Sometimes though, it is just perfect, because you can just finish a song at 1am...

MW The freedom thing again.

NH It's the freedom thing, yeah. It's good because you can do weird things and not have to explain them to anyone!

Dreamcrusher
"In Due Time"
From *Suite One* (PTP) 2023

NH I love that you're playing me the most distorted cuts [laughs].

MW I really love this track. I realise I'm actually playing all the crunchy ones together, there are some less noisy tracks coming up...

NH There was a time when I would like my songs to sound like crunchy peanut butter... a little bit smooth, but you also have the hard bits and you're mixing it together. And I feel like that's a good way of encapsulating what I do, the smooth voice and then the distortion.

MW This is a track by New York noise artist Dreamcrusher. It has an amazing wall of sound effect.

NH I love it, it sounds so eternal. That's also the thing I love about distortion – it just grows and keeps going. It's perfect music because you don't have to do too much, you can just be super simple with it, but come in with the most potent intention: today, you're gonna be swept off your feet.

MW Is it the physical aspect of noise music you enjoy the most?

NH Yeah, that's why I've got noisier and noisier as the years have gone by. As an audience member, it's disturbing, but also you're like [sighs] this is this amazing. It makes you feel good! It's the adrenaline rush, the speed, the eternity, the journey.

MW And you want your own shows to be an intense physical experience?

NH Yeah, one of the things that I wanted to do for the album was to make music that made my spirit come out of my body. And other music that inspired me was stuff that made me feel like the wind was blowing me away.

MW Like what?

NH Just good pop music. Actually, the most interesting thing I did [in research for the album] was trying to figure out how I wanted to write a vocal line for "The Last Day". I was bored, it was Saturday, and I've never really been to the opera before, but I went to the opera. I thought, let's try it. It was just such a weird experience, I was up in the cheap seats, and it didn't really move me, but I was there just trying to listen to the vocals and think how do I create something that can move an audience or move yourself? I left and got an ice cream, went home. It took an hour trying to figure out what it was I wanted to do. I think I was trying to push myself. I wasn't really fazed by it, but perhaps that specific opera wasn't my thing.

MW Which one was it?

NH It was *Salome* [by Richard Strauss]. There were people there that were getting their life, but I was just there for research!

Carola Baer
"Maker Of Me"
From *The Story Of Valerie* (Concentric Circles) 2018

MW What do you think to this voice?
NH It's good. I'm struggling to figure out who it is.
MW It's perhaps a bit of an obscure choice!
NH Is it? It sounds like an artist someone like [US singer-songwriter] Weyes Blood would be inspired by. It has that kind of ghost story sound.
MW It does have an eerie atmosphere, as well as a lo-fi quality. It's by an artist called Carola Baer. Someone came across a one-off cassette of some of her home recordings in a shop and it ended up being reissued. Though it sounds lo-fi, the vocals are still intensely powerful, which I'd say is also true of your work. The way you use your voice comes across as explorative – there are quiet trance-like lullaby moments and then really direct, hard-hitting soulful ones too.
NH For a long time, [my voice] was a mystery to me. I've always been a bit shy about it, but over the past few years I've got a better understanding of my body, and who I am. Now, when I make music, I sing how I would sing on stage, and if I had to play a show tomorrow I know what my voice feels like, what it sounds like, and what's required. That [understanding] makes everything more expressive and also easier to develop. And I think that's why I thought I should go to the opera – because those guys are the true expressive connoisseurs. And with the music I like, those people don't necessarily have to have spectacular voices, so I'm trying to work out where the middle ground is – making something ugly, but pouring gloss on top and making it shine.
MW With opera, it's expressive in a dramatic way, and it's also acting.
NH I mean, in a way, I am acting. I find deep memories and then play upon that, and use it as energy to sing in a certain way.
MW When I've seen you perform, it does feel like you're channelling something...
NH [Laughs] I try not to do that all the time because it does get a bit freaky... but sometimes it's nice. I think inside of me there are always two animals fighting; a really beautiful pony and a really ugly beast. [With my voice] I'm just trying to find the middle ground, which I think is just going to be the continuing theme.
MW Yes, when you have two opposing ideas, you reconcile them by finding...
NH ...balance. Yeah, otherwise, the pony wins, or the beast wins. I mean, that [dilemma] is also what the album is about. The beast can be over there [gestures], the pony can be here, maybe the beast's grazing somewhere... the balance doesn't have to be perfect but they have to not attack each other, and one can't win... this is getting very fantasy!
MW It's a nice image, and applies to your ideas and practice.

Lucrecia Dalt
"Atemporal"
From *¡Ay!* (RVNG Intl) 2022

NH This is really fun. It's super sensual!
MW This is by Lucrecia Dalt.
NH I'm going to go and listen to this whole album, I needed a gateway, this is so good.
MW Dalt experiments with her voice through sound as well as words, just like you do on your album...
NH Yeah, it's about utility, the voice as an instrument, as percussion.
MW This track is from the concept album *¡Ay!*. The protagonist is an alien, and you're seeing the world through their eyes. Both of your full-length releases have been concept albums too. What do you like about that way of making and releasing music?
NH I like to sit down and have the whole story. And also, I've always written, my whole entire life. So even when I had a period of vocal silence, it's crazy, but I was writing novels, I stopped about ten years ago, but I used to write like, 50,000 word novels.
MW So what kind of novels were you writing?
NH Weird mysteries, again, supernatural themes. So this thread's been going my whole entire life. I still find trying to explain *Fucking Hell* really hard, but the concept album always allows for an end and a beginning – there's something I like about having restrictions. And [a concept album] doesn't have to be the perfect story, it can be a really weird story, but because it's made out of parts, you have to try and make sure that all these fragmented bits make sense, separately and together. The concept is loose... but it's a good vehicle to hold all your songs in and get across what your album is about thematically.

Alice In Chains
"What The Hell Have I"
From *Last Action Hero OST* (Columbia) 1993

NH Is this from the 90s?
MW Yes, Alice In Chains. You mentioned pop punk earlier, but I often hear 90s grunge melodies running through your songs.
NH Yeah!
MW What do you like about it?
NH It's groovy, and it has a haze, it's chill. I remember a friend of mine said my first album sounded like Alice In Chains, and I was like, that's what I was going for!
MW Was it?
NH Yeah, but I suppose with the first album, I was really just testing out things, and it's weird to be judged by a work that I did on a whim and didn't think would be such a big deal. But that's what I wrote at that point and the ink is dry. You have to have conviction [the work] is crystallised, coated in amber.
MW I think it can sometimes be really great to see what happens when you put something out in a way that comes from an impatience, or maybe that's not the right word...
NH No, I'm deeply, deeply impatient! [Laughs]

Kim Gordon
"Air BnB"
From *No Home Record* (Matador) 2019

NH I know this track. I saw Kim Gordon at [London club] Koko last year. It was funny because she put her guitar in the audience like this [reaches out] and it was like... not a Renaissance painting... but something biblical. It's so good, the album is really good. I was reading a review of the show, where the writer criticised her for reading from a [lyric] booklet. I'm sorry, she could have read the alphabet on stage!

Sometimes when people are obviously trying something out you have to have patience with it. I was recently reading this piece on Frank Ocean and his [poorly received 2023] Coachella performance. I think it's so interesting that people weren't accepting. My opinion is just go with it, just vibe with it, let the waves wash over you. Being in a crowd full of people listening to music is so cool and such an experience and one that we don't do every day, so just take the experience. That sounds very spiritual, but in a way, music is a religion.
MW In Stephanie Phillips's interview with you in *The Wire* 439 [September 2020] you talk about your early musical experiences in church – do they still influence you?
NH Religious music was a starting point in the journey but I don't really listen to it any more. I mean, the closest I'll get is Whitney Houston or something, the really great American Black singers. But also, I'm on a Linkin Park thing at the moment, and I'm listening to it thinking, this is just distorted praise music! ○

Kim Gordon
Melodie McDaniel

Totally Wire-d!

As five former members of The Fall reunite in House Of All, over the next 20 pages *Wire* writers survey the expansive world of Mark E Smith and the group

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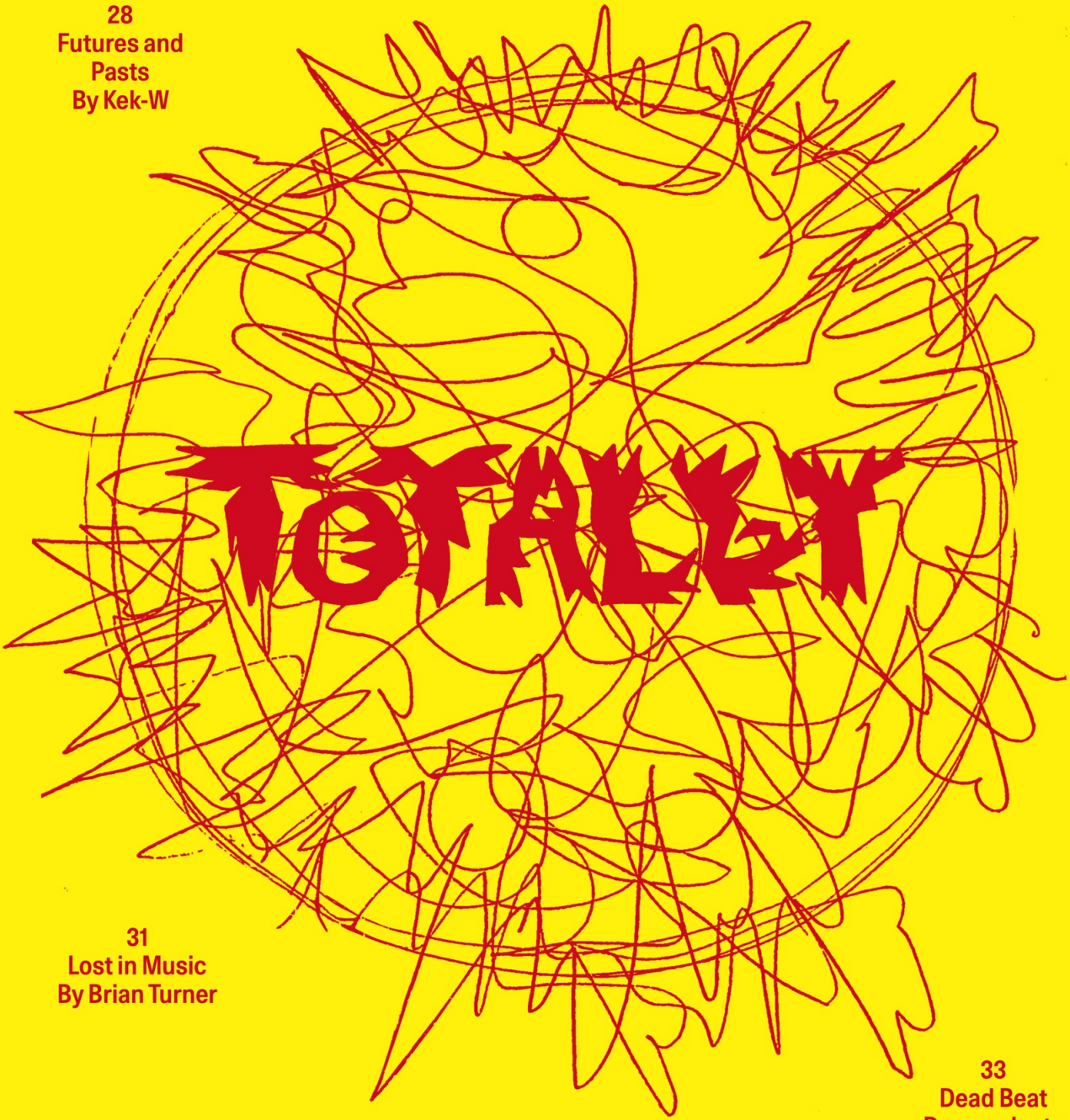

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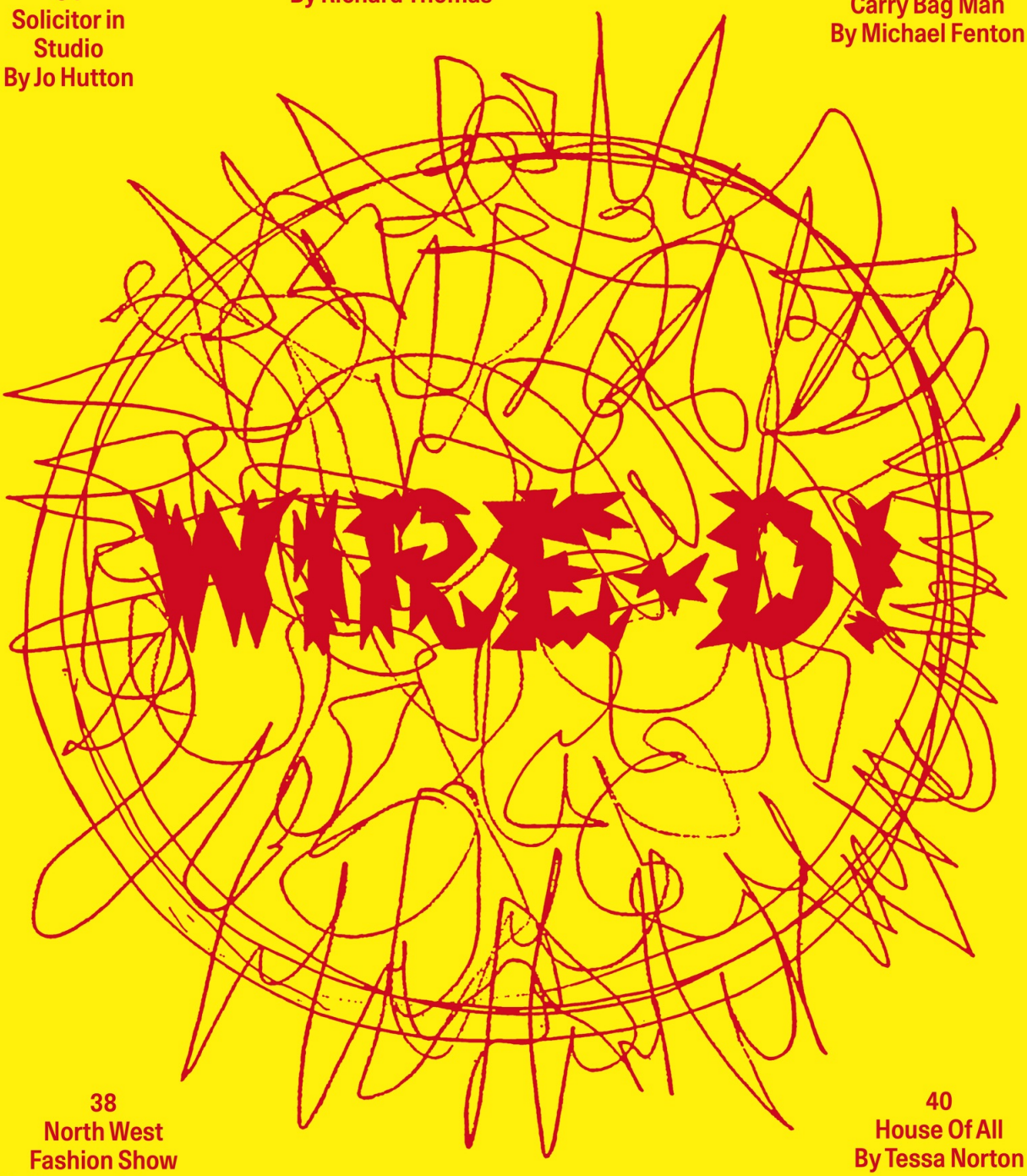

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Futures and Pasts

Vocalist and keyboardist Eleni Poulou brought collage, play and tension to The Fall's later work

By Kek-W

Lately, I've become obsessed with "I've Been Duped", a track on The Fall's 2008 album *Imperial Wax Solvent*. It's turned into a personal theme tune, a 4am earworm. The song covers typical Mark E Smith concerns – Jools Holland, *Two Men In A Trench*, the lack of decent post-pub telly – but the lyrics *"Late night on/ No odd groups/Just gambling"* point toward an awkward truth: that the 2005 Gambling Act kickstarted a proliferation of late night phone-in quiz shows in the UK that were basically casinos in camouflage.

Eleni Poulou's vocals sound emotionally blunted – at odds with the perky synth line and fizzing garage rock guitars – burned out by the banal, cash-obsessed nature of Brit culture. But the song, like the UK itself, carries on regardless, jogging uphill toward a chorus that's delivered in Poulou's best neue deutsche welle deadpan. *"I've been duped",* she says, clearly disappointed by Rip-Off Britain, but she's the lone voice of dissent. The rest of the group sound like they're pouring out of the pub or a football match as they enthusiastically sing-shout *"I've! Been! Duped!"* back at her, as if it were the name of the nation's favourite game show.

The chorus's rapid switching back and forth – its change of viewpoint, gender, plurality, mood – creates unresolved tension that feeds back into the verses, fuelling further disappointment and lyrical disgruntlement in the song's protagonist. The track is incredibly catchy, an anti-pop gem, but Poulou's vocal performance elevates it into something special.

Imperial Wax Solvent was recorded in Rochdale and Düsseldorf, a fact that in itself somehow feels Peak Fall. Poulou's fingerprints are all over the album: synthetic textures and tones, analogue colour, rhythmic bounce and occasional sawtooth gnarl. "Taurig" is a solo Poulou composition, an electronic piece with pneumatic, pump-like drums built from white noise, Kraftwerk's "Tour De France" reimagined for a lone woman cyclist. Her whispered lyrics are creepy and haunt the zone of Philip K Dick, suggesting lucid dreaming and dislocated personality states, people stepping outside of themselves, "outside of time" like Bob Arctor, the undercover cop from *A Scanner Darkly* who fails to recognise himself in surveillance footage.

Initially reluctant to join The Fall, Poulou stayed for 15 years, helping usher in a late-era purple patch that spiked somewhere around *Imperial Wax Solvent*. She married Smith in the early 2000s, helping him build the group back up after a period of financial insolvency. Without her, The Fall would have taken a very different course. In 2017, she returned to Berlin, the city where she had first befriended him 22 years earlier.

Her signature Korg MS-20 synthesizer was purchased when she was 15, traded for 30 Deutsche Marks and some chocolate. It has contributed to some classic Fall moments: the brittle, brooding, frost-covered second half of "Weather Report 2", the haunting three or four note leitmotif that hovers over "Blindness", Prestwich's abrasive, grinding love letter to "Sister Ray".

I have fond memories of live shows where Smith, intent on mid-set mischief, would play random notes on the Korg while Poulou, stern-faced, her arms folded, tried not to laugh. Like other analogue synths, it tends to detune easily. "That just adds to its charm," she explains during a gracious but glitch-ridden phone call from Germany. "Every MS-20 has its own character. Each one sounds unique." She still uses it regularly in Nohe Hoshe, her long-term trauma/identity dissolving sound art project with Croatian artist Petr Kišur.

Poulou is an accomplished visual artist herself. She enjoys creating graphic zines. "Mark made comics too," she tells me, giggling at the memory. "Drew cartoons, doodles. Funny stuff. Some of it ended up on record covers." Uncredited, she helped assemble The Fall's sleeve art using visual discardia and bricolage. The process was chaotic, hands-on, fun. "Situationist!" she laughs. She created the cover art for Smith's 2002 spoken word album *Pander! Panda! Panzer!*, co-created its audio collages, voicescapes and washes of ambient sound. Computers were famously banned at Smith's gaff in Winchester Avenue, Prestwich, so they used tapes, Nokia phones and a KO-1 Kaossilator, hacked a DVD player to build loops. Collage is a word that crops up regularly in our conversation: Poulou engages with images and sound in a three-dimensional way, and doesn't treat them as flat, singular objects, but as layers, strata. "Art should engage all our senses," she declares. "It should bring people together."

Like Smith, Poulou does not get mired in the past. She DJs, makes art, writes, records, is a restless serial collaborator. She talks enthusiastically about Organza Ray, her meditative ambient improv project with trombonist Hilary Jeffery and friends, and an upcoming show at the Berlin Superbooth synth fair. "I have tapes of Mark composing, working. There should be a Mark E Smith Archive," she concludes. A way in which fresh aspects of his work can be shared and developed. "Not album reissues and retrospectives, but brought into the now. It's what he would have wanted." ○

Eleni Poulou (centre) with The Fall, early 2010s

Courtesy Cherry Red

Glam Racket

Over two spells with The Fall Brix Smith used big riffs and style to beguile the listener

By Claire Biddles

Brix Smith (right) with Marcia Schofield and Mark E Smith, 1988

In the video, Brix Smith wears navy blue sequins, heather purple feathers, costume jewellery and patent black leather. Her eyelids are painted with glitter. She lights a cigarette. Her repeated guitar riff is languid, notes bending like tides controlled by her celestial presence. She towers above the rest of the band, who lay prone and ensnared at her feet. She's entered the frame from another place entirely, but her glamour has already begun to infect her surroundings. Her husband Mark Smith wears a liquid gold lamé shirt over his (spoilt) Victorian child-thin body.

Not inconsequentially, the name of the song is "LA", her decadent and depraved hometown. By the 1985 release of its parent album *This Nation's Saving Grace*, Brix had been in The Fall for two years, and had the group firmly under her spell. Her guitar parts on the album operate like incantations, whether the circular four-note riff of "Mansion", or the quartet of descending chords on "I Am Damo Suzuki" – repeated patterns to lure her prey. The Fall had always prioritised repetition, but Brix twisted this tendency into something supernaturally bewitching, with her irresistible hooks and hypnotic playing style.

Raised in the shadow of Hollywood and educated alongside novelists Donna Tartt and Bret Easton Ellis at Bennington College, Brix's mode of glamour was starkly exotic compared to her Salford bandmates. Sometimes, when videos cut to her – hair bleached bright white, equally captivating in a camo jacket or luxe fabrics – it felt like a jump-scare. Her guitar parts were as glam as she was, a sun-warmed and languorous foil to The Fall's restless, angular sounds and motorik rhythms, a stretch of satin laid across a bed of splinters.

The musical and aesthetic glamour reached its peak in 1988, with The Fall's involvement in Michael Clark's ballet *I Am Curious, Orange*, which they soundtracked and performed in, looking almost as strangely beautiful as the Leigh Bowery costumed dancers. "Big New Prinz", which opens their subsequent soundtrack release *I Am Kurious Oranj*, is a literal interpretation of glamorous music, incorporating a relentless stomping beat into a rework of "Hip Priest" from *Hex Enduction Hour*. Brix's sinister riff is repeated over and over, more delicious each time. Unlike some glam rock, it's less suggestive of showy aesthetic decadence for its own sake, and more revelatory of its underlying seediness.

As with the Hollywood excess in "LA" or the Hammer Horror glamour of "Mansion", Brix was expert at reflecting the dark and supernatural. She could be considered something of an occult practitioner herself, mixing personal and musical glamour to create a third kind, an illusionary charm used to manifest one's deepest desires. During her initial six year stint in the band, The Fall became more popular and acclaimed than they had ever been. Her magick worked.

Brix left The Fall in 1989, but rejoined in 1994. Perhaps the group used some magick of their own, summoning her back with *The Infotainment Scan*'s "Glam-Racket". The song, a typically sardonic character assassination from Mark E Smith allegedly aimed at bassist Steve Hanley, is a reprise of the glam rock stomp of "Big New Prinz". After her return, Brix added her own verse at the end during a live session. Such was her ability to beguile, she was able to make it a vicious take-down of Mark (*"Go shine on someone else/'Cause your act has lost all its appeal"*) without him even realising.

Although Brix left the group for good in 1996, traces of her presence remained. The glam rock beat was back on 2003's "Mountain Energei", but this time the alluring/ominous incantation was sung by concurrent voices. Around the same time, her exotic personal glamour was being transposed to a more down to Earth, recognisably northern English mode. Eleni Poulou exuded a particularly northern DIY glam, sporting leopardskin coats and carrying her handbag on stage with her, setting it down next to her keyboard before each gig. Mark E Smith often cited *Coronation Street* as his favourite TV show; perhaps the brassy matriarchs of the soap opera also had something of a subconscious hold over his group.

Although he was famously the only consistent member of The Fall over their five decade existence, Mark E Smith has less of a claim to being called the leader of the group than it may seem. As Brix repeats her seductive riff in "LA", Mark chants weakly, powerless against the forces channelling through him, off-beat as though no longer aware of his surroundings: *"ELL ELL ELL ELL/AYY AYY AYY AYY/ELL ELL ELL ELL/AYY AYY AYY AYY"*. Brix, directly quoting her favourite film *Beyond The Valley Of The Dolls*, states what we already knew, and what would remain true for The Fall's entire existence: *"This is my happening and it freaks me out!"* ○

Paul Cox

The Wonderful and Frightening World

The Fall's 1982 New Zealand tour reduces the audience to a quivering wreck

By Bruce Russell

Early in 1982 the news broke. Instantly some mates of mine shot down the road with a spray can and defaced the biggest advertising billboard they could find in Christchurch in large letters: "BANG! FUCKING BANG! THE MIGHTY FALL ARE COMING!!!"

That was the tenor of the times. New Zealand was possessed by post-punk, maddened by import restrictions and three month old English music papers. The Velvet Underground and The Stooges may have been gods to us, but now Mark E Smith was their anointed prophet, coming to extend his grumpy and incomprehensible benediction to us all.

I was a 21 year old university student in Dunedin and had discovered the Fall in 1981 when "Totally Wired" and *Grotesque (After The Gramme)* were belatedly released in this country (even troubling the charts, as Joy Division also had). Domestic release was crucial. Until 1984 record imports were tightly controlled as part of an economy built on import substitution, and only a lucky few had access to them. We pored over covers, desperate for clues to what was happening in the wider world, and *Grotesque* had revealed to my avid gaze a very strange world indeed. And as soon as that graffiti went up, we were hit by the greatest one-two punch in popular music history: "Lie Dream Of A Casino Soul" and *Hex Enduction Hour*. New Zealand was Fall mad.

By the time the August university break rolled around, I was fizzing at the bung. A 350 kilometre bus ride separated us from Christchurch, but the distance was negated in a flash by the news that New Zealand's finest The Clean were reforming, three months after their shock dissolution, to support The Fall at both Christchurch shows. That excitement no doubt contributed to the extremely unwise decision on the eve of the first show to add some kind of ephedrine based cough syrup to the standard beer and pot cocktail.

The Tuesday show on 17 August was in the modernist confines of the University of Canterbury Student Union's so-called ballroom, a university union venue that easily held 500–600 people, with a low stage on one side. The Clean's set was a thrill but a familiar one, and even they seemed a bit constrained by the anticipation we all felt.

The Fall led off abruptly with "Impression Of J Temperance", and its eldritch subject matter, allied to the twin drummer attack, and Steve Hanley's snow-ploughing bass, had a devastating impact on my keyed-up psyche – I was *fucking terrified* by this band. The panic did not let up, and by about the end of "The Classical" my girlfriend and I were outside in a small shrubbery, screaming in a state of total meltdown. The band were still clearly audible, so we talked each other down and made it back inside after a few minutes. I would sooner have been melted to a puddle of black tar than miss this.

My terror was not simply a product of unwise pharmaceutical abuse. Mark E Smith was famously adept at dominating audiences with his stare. Even the shopping bag he brought on stage looked menacing, as he periodically abstracted cassette players and other sundry paraphernalia from its depths to unleash aural projectiles upon us.

Behind him the band were not so much anchored as driven, by two drummers, Paul Hanley and Karl Burns. The band locked step across these two unremittingly propulsive engines with an apparently psychic coordination. I was used to bands who sounded vaguely like this but had never seen a group capable of lurching maniacally, without a missed beat, through such a brutally choreographed repertoire, without visible direction of any kind.

Year years later I met an Englishman who had seen Swell Maps once as a teenager, and he told me without prompting that their overwhelmingly alien attack had reduced him to a terrified emotional pulp. I knew how he felt.

The second night was totally different in terms of venue and set (only five songs out of 29 played at both gigs were repeated). The acoustically splendid Town Hall seemed only a quarter full, and we watched from a safe distance. The experience confirmed that my fundamental understanding of the previous night was correct. The crystal clarity of the group's collective impact was matched only by the obliquity of lyrical content and the indefinable wrongness of how 'right' they were. It was to be many years before I fully understood how hard it is to approach rock music from such a fully sideways angle – and how central to that is actual ignorance of how to play 'properly'.

Despite my initial incomprehension, the fundamental lesson was well learned. I never again saw The Fall able to deliver in that way, and I agree with Paul Hanley's appreciation that 1982 represented a highpoint in the band's capability, MES included. To find our own route to their giddy summit was the existential challenge we accepted from The Fall. A quest that has subsequently come to shape my whole life. ○

Mark E Smith at Lincoln Road, Auckland, 1982

Carol Tippett

Lost in Music

Acolytes and chroniclers of The Fall pursue their obsession across websites and fanzines

By Brian Turner

"The people who follow The Fall are the salt of the Earth," Mark E Smith opined to *The Tube* TV presenter Muriel Gray in 1985, "but they're not the sort of people who attack you in supermarkets and things, which is the greatest thing about it." While Smith embraced the diverse classes of fandom from all walks of life, he also remained vigilant and opinionated on the vast array of print and online chroniclers who foisted information on the public. At one juncture in 2015, I had announced a six hour radio series for East Coast station WFMU with some veteran members in play, and was greeted with a cryptic, anonymous missive from one of the Fall websites sternly reminding me the latter, post-millenium era of the band I had not focused on was of great importance and I should get educated on it. Whether this came from the man himself or some other high level guardian of Fall media I never learned, but from what I gathered, words were being monitored from someone of "authority".

Indeed, minute details of every release date, bits of stage banter, setlists and gig flyers via sites like *thefall.org*, The Mighty Fall Facebook group and others underline the rabid nature of Fall fans across the globe. Seeing their posts and interactions also highlights a curious thing: for some, their jump into the pool of fandom was triggered by unlikely events. In many cases, there was no magic bullet, but rather awareness of the band with an indescribable feeling that something about them was different. My own experience in 1985 was watching late night MTV when its IRS Records produced underground show *The Cutting Edge* offered an electrifying few minutes with Mark and Brix in LA talking between snippets of The Gruppe tearing up *Wonderful And Frightening World Of The Fall* tunes in a Santa Monica record store. Eventual later music clips for "There's A Ghost In My House" and "Victoria" made US TV waves and continued to spool my curiosity, then access to the pre-Beggars era *Perverted By Language* VHS compilation and a few collections of early singles turned my head to realise there was an avalanche of information to gather. It took decades to absorb.

Stefan Cooke, who along with Conway Paton edits the expansive *thefall.org* site, agrees: "I wish I could claim that the heavens parted when John Peel played "Bingo-Master's Break-Out!", but that wasn't to be. My school pal Peter was a fan and bought all their records. We would tape and swap Peel sessions, and there was definitely something going on in "New Face In Hell" that stirred me." Says Paton: "I heard them via student radio when I was at Auckland University in the late 1970s. The earliest tracks passed me by without making much impact until "Totally Wired". I was very taken with *Grotesque* and the *Slates* 10", both of which I bought as expensive English imports. The arrival of *Hex Enduction Hour* rather confounded me and I really struggled with that album."

Rob Waite's *The Biggest Library Yet* fanzine arrived in 1994 just prior to the explosion of internet newsgroups, and has since been archived online. He professes to the instant bang: "I was 16 years of age, watching them going through their paces in a sports hall, October 1979, Bircotes Leisure Centre. The riffs, the pounding rhythm section, the snarling arrogance, the combination of malevolence and humour all made for a heady mix. Too many punk by numbers bands were treading the boards at the time, but here was the real deal, standing out from the in-crowd (and probably the out-crowd too) in a completely unique, unpretentious and unselfconscious sort of way."

For Cooke, recording a superb 1988 Boston gig simulcast on WFNX complete with Smith's live onstage barking at someone in the crowd smoking Indonesian cigs, and laughing at the smoker's support of a fascist government, triggered his particular obsession with the band's live recordings. He continued to dive into a heavy cassette trading network by mail.

Despite the solid, enduring nature of The Fall's catalogue, it's remarkable how each fan's dedication comes from eclectic introductory points that expand over a long time. "The question of how would I explain The Fall to any uninitiated friend or relative is fairly easy to answer, inasmuch as: I wouldn't," offers Waite. "If you need to discover The Fall then you will. If you need it explaining then you never have done. And as regards another commonplace question: what genre of music would you place The Fall under? The Fall are a genre all of their own." ○

Athlete Cured

The Fall's relentless jukebox provides the ideal street soundtrack

By Dave Segal

The Fall's best decade of recordings – the 1980s – fortuitously coincided with my peak years of competitive distance running. Stay with me now. Back then, I was training 16–20 kilometres a day in preparation for road races, including marathons. During competitions, I would always have an array of favourite songs looping in my head to spur me to run faster. Notorious boozehound and chainsmoker Mark E Smith might have had a phlegmy chuckle over the thought of some young bloke from metro Detroit using his songs to help quicken his running pace. But damn, if The Fall's catalogue isn't full of inspirational tunes that trigger adrenaline spikes crucial for optimal athletic performance.

Like all runners before the advent of earbuds, I had to rely on my own mental jukebox for motivation. And The Fall loom large in that regard. *Grotesque (After The Gramme)* in particular abounds with cuts built for speed – and endurance. Long, midtempo chuggers such as "The NWRA" and "New Face In Hell" synced well with my stride rhythm in long races. Plus, there was something about Smith's refrain in the former song – *"The North will rise again"* – that inflated my lungs with supercharged air. Other *Grotesque* songs such as "The Container Drivers" and "Pay Your Rates" alternate between breakneck tempos and cooling reveries that work as ideal accompaniment for speed work, such as repeat 200 or 400 metre sprints. "Lay Of The Land" from *The Wonderful And Frightening World Of The Fall* offers a similar sprint/trot structure.

Paul Hanley's opening drum break from "Totally Wired" simulates the frenzied lub-dub of a heart beating while in hot pursuit of the finish line or a personal running record. The song is an aptly titled series of jittery, rapturous crescendos that jolts your body into amped-up agility. On "Bombast" from *This Nation's Saving Grace*, Brix Smith and Craig Scanlon's scathing guitar riffs and Karl Burns's punishing beats act as whiplashes to your ass when you need to surge ahead of a competitor.

The Fall's fleetest cut "Fit And Working Again" is essentially a self-fulfilling prophecy. Stephen Hanley's supremely urgent bassline is an effective prod to step on it (incidentally, if you want to know how dazed and woozy a runner feels after crossing the finish line, play "Disney's Dream Debased".)

I no longer race, but if any *Wire* readers do, I recommend that you load your playback device with these tracks. It's just a gut (of the quantifier) feeling that they'll work for you too. ○

Hip Priest

Strange forces animated Mark E Smith's hold over his audience

By Esi Eshun

Trying to sum up the nature of Mark E Smith's power over audiences isn't straightforward. In his declamatory and abrasive voice, evocative of the startled sound of a ghost cat lashed to the metal roof of a car, there seemed to be a peculiar capacity to collapse the distinction between being and performing. On stage, notwithstanding sardonic and disgruntled displays of attitude, there would sometimes be a disconcerting summoning forth, a merging and diverging of aspects of his personae, made cohesive by the direct expressive qualities of his voice. In his use of sprechstimme, the speaking/singing vocal style associated with European modernist composers such as Schoenberg, his voice could impact on audiences at an immediate sensory level allowing his fragmentary, often oblique lyrics to be absorbed and appreciated without necessarily being understood.

When asked to discuss his own work, Smith, like many commentators, referenced his love of early 20th century horror fiction, citing as inspiration writers such as HP Lovecraft, MR James and Arthur Machen who knew how to mix the uncanny with the mundane, the supernatural with the parochial. Drawing on the unsettling terrain of their stories, Smith crafted songs such as "Spectre Vs Rector", in which grinding, working class, industrial Mancunian landscapes came steeped with occult possibilities. For Simon Reynolds, writing in 1988, such possibilities enabled Smith to alchemise "Northern squalor into a kind of magic realism". A fair assessment certainly, but one which left unlocked the key to Smith's enduring and beguiling but disturbing hold over his disciples.

Looking for answers, I imagined that some of his appeal stemmed from his possession of the kind of avant garde sensibility shared by Antonin Artaud, the early 20th century French writer, poet, dramatist, actor, artist, theatre director and, briefly, Surrealist, who, in the 1930s pioneered the still startling notion of the Theatre of Cruelty before a decades' long incarceration in asylums hastened his death at the age of 51. In a manner not entirely convergent with Smith's, Artaud used sound and body to bypass the primacy of text in theatre, employing a range of gestures, movement, screams, cries, phatic and inarticulate vocalisations, alongside perturbing noises, in a bid to bring about a direct engagement between bodies and psyches. Where he veered closer to Smith, was in his aim to stir and shake up energies in audiences by confronting and consorting with forces, both wanted and unwanted, inside and outside of himself, in order to release them in a form of collective expiation.

All of this came to mind recently when I was reading Tony Herrington's 1996 interview with Smith in *The Wire* 151, in which it came as no surprise to learn that in his teenage years, Smith had grappled with incipient psychic powers. In it, he talked darkly about wanting to suppress his abilities, about his mother's fascination with precognition, about his watches routinely but unexpectedly exploding, about the psychic culture on the long vanished Salford docks where he'd once been employed and where it was not uncommon for working men to predict the deaths of people they scarcely knew. In all this, he drew a picture of a time and place in which certain seams of occulted knowledge, long since extirpated from mainstream currents of British society, could still find vivid forms of expression.

Reflecting further on this phenomenon, I was struck by something I'd long felt intuitively but hadn't quite had the nerve to articulate. It seemed to me that a large aspect of Smith's power was bound up with his bearing the mark, the attributes of a conjure man, an African-American term for an individual recognised the world over for their capacity to manipulate at will, energies/frequencies/pulses, more often than not for good, but at times, for ill.

The figure of the conjure man bears a close resemblance in African-American cultural traditions to the Priest-Medicine Man, described by social historian WEB DuBois in *The Souls Of Black Folk* (1903) as a figure who "found his function as a healer of the sick, the interpreter of the Unknown, the comforter of the sorrowing, the supernatural avenger of the wronged and the one who rudely but picturesquely expressed longing, disappointment and resentment of a stolen and oppressed people".

Certainly, given Smith's admiration for the notoriously racist Lovecraft, there's a bitter irony to be had in suggesting an affinity with the conjure role. And yet, just as Smith's European avant garde propensities are palpable though not always acknowledged, so it should be feasible to imagine a situation in which the type of conjure energies integral to the development and expression of the blues, jazz, rock, etc, might well have sought out and attached themselves to the body of a man working in those same traditions but located, incongruously, within the begrimed heartlands of post-industrial Manchester.

The often inherited role of the conjure person is not always a welcome one. Invested with powers that can at first seem ungovernable, the individual must learn to discipline and respect their capacities if they are to avoid destroying themselves and others into the bargain. As such, unlike the largely benign Priest-Medicine Man, they make ambivalent figures, eliciting great respect and fear in equal measure, not least for their potential to disrupt and subvert the social order. In the circumstances, it's possible to speculate that in Smith's case he chose not to give himself fully to the demands of the role, opting instead to do the work at a slight remove – channelling the demands of soothsayer and transformer into writing and performance – using lyrics, chants, stories, poems, incantations, rhythm, pitch, noise, to cut through space, to hit the audience in the gut and to stir electrical impulses in the body, so that, for those susceptible to such forces, something might change viscerally or subtly inside them, and they might become, to a greater or lesser extent, his creature...

In the same interview, Smith spoke about The Fall's experiences performing in Brazil, a country in which conjure energies are uniformly recognised. Painting a portrait of a schismatic society, stratified according to race, class and income, he told a story of a gig in which, throughout the performance, the majority of the 5000 strong Black audience members had been incarcerated inside a cage positioned at the back of the hall. Bursting free at last of their confines, the crowd surged towards the stage for the encore, in a collective act of homage to a fellow member of the working classes, whose gift to them was to use his voice, lyrics and rhythms to access and liberate forms of power operating within a social context in which so many other types of power would be manifestly denied them. In so doing, Mark E Smith fulfilled his role as conjure man with aplomb. ○

Dead Beat Descendants

The Fallen Women started as a birthday present to Mark E Smith and continue after his death to provide catharsis via karaoke

By Leah Kardos

"A primary objective of the band is to make sure that the singers are having a lovely time," says Heidi Heelz, bassist of The Fallen Women, the world's best and only all-female Fall karaoke band. "Obviously, we have a lovely time too, but I'm not sure that I've been in a band that is a public service before. It's really life affirming."

Every Fallen Woman is of distinguished indie pedigree. There's guitarist Charley Stone, formerly of Gay Dad and Salad, who currently plays with Sleeper and Desperate Journalist. Jen Denitto used to play bass with Linus and drummed for The Monochrome Set. A second drummer, Mel Reardon, plays with punk band Foxcunt, and synth player Lolo Wood is a member of The Wup Chow and Ye Nuns, the all-female Monks covers band. Heelz has been a fixture of gig and club scenes for decades, running events, DJing and playing with The Guillotines, Proxy Music and The Priscillas. Matt Abysmal (honourary woman) is their compère and stand-in singer for rehearsals.

Heelz got the group together at the suggestion of *The Quietus*'s John Doran to perform at an event celebrating Mark E Smith's 60th birthday in March 2017. "There was one he specifically wanted to sing, "Senior Twilight Stock Replacer". Obviously, we had to include famous songs like "Big New Prinz", "Totally Wired" and "Touch Sensitive"." What was meant to be a temporary arrangement became an openended project. "We love hanging out together and it is just such a preposterous thing to do," Heelz says, "so why would we stop?"

Barely ten months later, Mark E Smith's death on 24 January 2018 forced the band to rethink their purpose. "We didn't want to be seen to be profiteering from somebody's demise. But then again, we were established before that, and we still wanted to do something worthy. That's when I came up with the charity idea." Since that time The Fallen Women have been putting on special events with special guests to raise money for Cancer Research and Macmillan Cancer Support.

"The first charity event we did was only a month after he passed, and there was an amazing atmosphere. It was celebratory, it was cathartic, people were really singing their hearts out. We had Simon Donald from *Viz* magazine, Robin Ince, Debbie Smith (Echobelly, Snowpony), James Fry (Earl Brutus), Luke Haines, Sharon Horgan and comedy writer Danielle Ward... basically a lot of comedians and indie musicians."

Existing as an all-female group, it's dispiriting but unsurprising to hear that reactions from some members of The Fall's male-dominated fanbase were suspicious at first. "We got quite a bit of schtick from 'the league of bald-headed men'," she laughs, "as Mark E Smith used to call them. But then it transpired that Mark had sent his sister to our second show in Manchester. She thought it was hilarious and brilliant, so we kind of got a pass before he died, and people did actually end up shutting up. Ex-members of The Fall are very supportive. Steve Hanley has been lovely to us over the years. Brix [Smith] came and sang a couple of songs with us in 2019."

Today their set list boasts around 45 songs for prospective singers to choose from. Occasionally they'll indulge a special request, but generally the list is the law. "We do get people coming up and going, 'Can you do that Japanese bootleg version of "Tempo House"?' And we just politely decline. Like no, just pick a song that we know, sing it and have a lovely time."

For some fans living out their MES fantasies on stage, the temptation to engage in some method acting has been hard to resist. "We do get some very drunk people on, and we get people coming on with bags of cans." Disruptive mischief on stage, however, is never tolerated. "We tend to shut down that kind of behaviour quite quickly. Amp twiddlers are given a swift kick up the arse, metaphorically."

According to Heelz, the main qualities that make for a good Fall karaoke performance are heart and enthusiasm. "I really like it when people who have never been on stage before really get into it. You can see it's an absolute joy for them, and it's lovely to be able to offer that experience. On the other hand, it's also brilliant singing with people who really know their stuff, like Miki Berenyi from Lush. Jo Bevan from Desperate Journalist is another example of someone just absolutely giving it some welly. The demographic of the fanbase is traditionally quite male and old, so we try and encourage non-men to come and sing. Women and nonbinaries to the front, basically." ○

The Fallen Women

Green Eyed Loco-Man

Pride goes before The Fall? Not even a little bit!

By Eugene S Robinson

"Do you think a life led beyond fear is a desirable end?" The questioner was a physics professor whose area of expertise was quantum mechanics. "There are different types of fear," offered the Spinoza professor. Forget, for a second, the fact that all three of us were standing naked in the desert in Arizona. The question seemed valid or at least as valid as anything else that might drip into the heads of those who had consumed massive quantities of psychedelics. "But in general I believe fearlessness to be a product of... stupidity."

The conversation petered out, shifting, quicksilver-like, to something else germane to men without clothes in the desert. Being neither a physics professor nor a Spinoza expert though, my mind wandered. To? To the people I believed I understood as truly fearless.

Mark E Smith came to mind. Not because he was always on my mind but on the occasion of just having read an article on him wherein he lambasted, upbraided and ridiculed all and sundry. It was a nice antidote to the Ian MacKaye-esque equanimity, a disturbing American trait that underscores a hardcore belief in things being fundamentally OK, that seemed to be in fashion.

Smith had gleaned that things were fundamentally NOT OK though, and gave voice to it, and so in both spirit, word and deed, he was laying it all out there. He was mocking other musicians for having bad bands AND bad teeth. He was namechecking a list where everyone was naughty, no one was nice and, most of all, his lack of concern regarding where these chips might fall. Epic and nonexistent.

Morrissey was, among other things, "a scum-egg; a horrid trendy wretch". Kate Bush, who he "never even liked... the first time around" caused him to query... well, the world: "Who decided it was time to start liking her again?" And Pavement? "Haven't got an original idea in their heads."

All of which was amazing to me since he was a man who had no discernible self-defence skills in a world where someone like him might have found them terribly necessary. But armoured with a lack of concern regarding repercussions Smith fired band members for eating salads, or dancing to The Clash; and attacked band members on stage and during shows, for which he had been arrested and sentenced to anger management and alcohol abuse classes.

Is it telling though that the only person he was publicly called to account for attacking physically was a woman? Was that a sign that no matter how drunk he was, his animal brain was still adept at avoiding real danger making his schtick, therefore, a fanciful con. I'm unsure and am never asked either since the media has felt it much more necessary to find out what I thought about Smith's lyrical use of the word n***er. It would have been too easy for me to take umbrage at him having done so and would have displayed a marked lack of understanding that Mark's war was ultimately with both structure and status quo (as evidenced by him never finding peace with his musical art). So, no... if I was going to shape a real tribute to the man behind the music of The Fall it would begin thusly: it's not so much that Mark E Smith was fearless about his not giving a shit, it's more that he was very much serious about being fearless about not giving a shit.

So being asked if you are/were a fan of The Fall is not even the right question anymore. Especially not if the right answer will always be and remains, according to Smith himself, "Fuck you."

But now he's gone. And Nick Cave the Christian runs a self-help blog. The aforementioned Morrissey can't be arsed to play a show for fear of sneezing, and Johnny Rotten shills for Trump and struggles with sausages and propulsive weight gain.

Well, everything changes and life is change but the refusal to play nice? A blessing in much more than disguise. And if we ever needed a signpost of the kind of true north that could guide this perfectly modern brand of fearlessness, it is clear, hands down, that it was because of Mark E Smith. I just wished I had cared enough to tell him so when he was alive.

Sadly though this town wasn't big enough for two aggressively dour pricks. And right now? It doesn't have to be. Because the King is dead. So now long live the king. ○

Solicitor in Studio

Longterm producer, engineer and soundman Grant Showbiz used "vibes and ears" to corral anarchic energies onto tape

By Jo Hutton

The Fall were known for frequent changes of line-up, but one of the longest term members of the team outside of Mark E Smith is soundman Grant Showbiz, who produced or engineered over a dozen records from *Dragnet* (1979) to *Re-Mit* (2013) and did their live sound for much of the band's career, alongside high-profile engagements for The Smiths and Billy Bragg.

Showbiz recalls that a brief stint in the early 1970s as Steve Hillage's guitar tech proved "an unmitigated disaster". His lack of technical knowledge at the time manifested in a near-death experience at Hammersmith Odeon: "We took all the pedals out of their boxes so Steve could control them at a little desk. I tried to fix it whilst switched on and ended up 30 feet from where I'd been." After following Hillage's old band Gong around as a fan, Showbiz became soundman for hippy band Hear & Now, invested with drummer Kif Kif (Keith Dobson) in the "Green Goddess" tour bus/PA, and got in touch with The Fall's then manager, Kay Carroll, who agreed in 1978 to the bus and PA services offered. "A soundman was born," says Showbiz.

He was never sacked from The Fall, possibly because he connected with Smith before he became the celebrated Mark E character of later years, and due to his genuine love for the music and the whole group, while also keeping a certain distance from their problems. "I have no recollection of ever having a conversation with any of the band members or Mark about music," he reveals. There was no discussion about harmonies, keys, bridges or choruses. Smith's lyrics provided the structure of the songs, but he was constantly changing them live without warning. Instead the band talked of piecing together "bits" of sound through jamming and borrowing from bands such as The Velvet Underground.

The group were born out of Smith's revolutionary poetry readings with improvised musical accompaniment. "Being working class first generation English/Irish lads, their improvisations involved chords and being in time with each other," says Showbiz. "They weren't going skrink, skrank, skronk." But there was an underlying sense of chaos to The Fall's music, with their off-tunings (they tuned instruments by ear) and Smith's on and off stage antics. Showbiz produced "Hip Priest", one of The Fall's great songs: "I had to explain to the studio engineer in Iceland that the band weren't tuning up, they'd started the song and the tapes should be running." During gigs, Smith used to go around the stage switching off guitar amps or unplugging mics at random, which according to guitarist Brix Smith made them better musicians. One might assume it was frustrating for the soundman, but Showbiz clarifies that Smith only did this later in the 2000s. When he'd worked with the band in the 1970s, they operated more as a co-operative.

Showbiz considers his producer role as "vibes and ears". He

doesn't have a distinctive sonic aesthetic in the way of other producers, except that he is known for his focus on the vocals. "I'd like to think if there's one defining element to my sound, it's that you can hear what people are saying, and that's very important.

"I do want there to be a communication that comes through the song and I have to believe in it," he continues. "I like to do all the things in the studio we've been told we can't do." He tried to let the musicians play in their own way and for him to capture *their* unique sound, such as recording *Dragnet* live with Smith walking around the studio holding his microphone. He also values productivity – something he shares with Smith, who aimed to release two albums per year – and that when he's in control in the studio they "get it out".

Showbiz's last gig with The Fall was a supporting slot for Swans in Manchester. Later, he realised that Smith was singing on stage about how freaked out the band were to hear that he was dying. "That was an amazing thing to do," says Showbiz. "I'm very, very sad that I won't get another phone call from him. I really miss him, he was just such a constant in my life." The Smith he knew was caring and gentlemanly, a long way from his grumpy reputation. "His legacy is the miracle of a kind of Blakeian working class genius actually managing to make a living and make brilliant, astonishing art." ○

Papal Visit

The anarchic stage play cum musical *Hey! Luciani* marked The Fall's entry point into theatre and dance and is a high watermark of their creative process

By Richard Thomas

"Europe 1870. The first Vatican council meets and guarantees an infallible Pope. Spain gang is in disarray and top gang France is recovering from a fight it could not finish. Meanwhile in Alsace-Lorraine state, F Nietzsche hospital orderly manages Turks and Prussians – Turks! – encouraged by the manipulating British gangs to play a bigger part than realised in the forthcoming shoot-out scenario."

That is Mark E Smith's introduction to *Hey! Luciani: The Times, Life & Codex Of Albino Luciani*. It was delivered just before Christmas 1986 to an audience of roughly 200 people, and heralded an unusual occurrence: an avant garde/post-punk/rock 'n' roll group from Manchester making an incursion into another artistic zone of production and performance, theatre, in the distant territory of London.

The Fall were, like me, working class autodidact proles and an art threat. I remember reading about the play as a 14 year old in the music weeklies, and it has remained an enigma for me and many others. Certainly few musicians other than Smith were making references in their work to Vladimir Nabokov (with *Bend Sinister*) and no other group has had the courage, wit or imagination to enter into theatre and dance spaces and have a crack at it and form intersectional bonds.

Investigating the play led me through strange inter-dimensional portals into the past. Time adjacent spaces, parallel realities. For instance, the theatre in which *Hey! Luciani* was produced and staged was where the BBC originally shot *Doctor Who*. The 7" *Hey! Luciani* was recorded at Amazon Studios in Kirkby, Merseyside, which according to drummer Simon Wolstencroft was located on the same housing estate where Phil Redmond's classic Channel 4 soap opera *Brookside* was shot.

What's certain is that The Fall were an active part of the cast, dressing up as priests and Mafiosi, and Trevor Stuart, Leigh Bowery, Al-ana Pellay and Lucy Burge were also part of the performance, which included a number of Fall songs. The subject of the play was the short lived Pope John Paul I, birth name Albino Luciani whose reign lasted for 33 days until he had a cardiac arrest and died in September 1978.

"The first job I had was driving Mark up to Liverpool to Amazon Studios," says Simon Wolstencroft, who joined The Fall shortly before the production. "I played a floor tom over the middle-eight of "Hey! Luciani"... that was my first introduction to the recording world of The Fall. I didn't think much about it.

"One of my abiding memories is of Mark on the press night, when *The Times* of London and various other broadsheets and *Time Out* were there," he continues, "parading around in his film director role. He had a pair of white Levi's jeans on, riding boots, a black leather coat, a short sleeve shirt and a riding crop."

Michael Clark was choreographer in residence at Riverside Studios. *Hey! Luciani* marked the beginning of several productive collaborations with The Fall. "I went to Mark and said, 'Would you be interested in writing a play?'," Clark recalls. "I was genuinely, selfishly curious to see what he might come up with.

"I think they found it amusing, the world that I came from, the dance world," he continues. "I was trying to work against that. That wasn't why I got involved in dance. I wanted people to come and see my work who didn't want to see dance... I chose to work with people like Leigh Bowery and Mark E Smith who had very strong ideas of their own and weren't going to change their ideas for me. And that's what I wanted, I wanted to thicken the plot by working with people who had equally strong ideas as my own."

Broadcaster Jackie O'Malley was a teenager at the time, and met Smith in Manchester's Haçienda club. "I said, 'Oh I'm just about to become a drama student' and he found that fascinating... he said, 'Well I'm putting a play on this year, do you want to be involved in it?'

"I view it as being like a Fall album," she says of *Hey! Luciani*. "Mark to me, his interest was in the creative process itself. He wasn't interested in the end result. It was shambolic and because I was young I didn't really know what to expect. It was so free and easy, and it was more about the creative process. He loved to be around people, he wanted to discuss things, talk about ideas, he loved writing, he always had a plastic bag with papers in it, anything that interested him he'd write it down."

"Mark was rigorous, he wasn't just going to see what he could get away with, he took it seriously," adds Clark. "I learned from working with Mark, a true artist is what I'd call him. I learned you must let them do what they want to do because that's what they will do best ultimately." ○

Hey! Luciani programme, 1986

Fibre Book Troll

Mark E Smith's way with words traverses postmodern fiction, vorticist poetry and social satire with an omnipresent sense of the gothic

By Graham Duff

I first encounter The Fall in 1978, age 14. I love Mark E Smith's lyrics so much I copy them out in the back of a school exercise book. 45 years later, I'm a professional screenwriter. One who freely admits his scripts are stained with his influence: the cynicism, the fascination with heightened states, psychic energy, multiple time lines, repurposed horror and sci-fi tropes, and an affinity for the odd within the quotidian.

With songs such as "Futures And Pasts" and "Spectre Vs Rector", the first two Fall albums showcase Mark E Smith's inherent narrative skills. But on 1980's *Grotesque (After The Gramme)*, his storytelling assumes a sharper focus. "New Face In Hell", "C'n'C-S Mithering", "Impression Of J Temperance", "In The Park" and "The NWRA" all exhibit strong narrative drives. While the 'story songs' sometimes disobey the core rules of storytelling, they always summon vivid worlds, characters and situations, all delivered with working class nous and an ear for unusual word clusters. It makes for an unashamedly literary listening experience.

While The Fall's sound went through many evolutions over four decades – garage rock, spindly psychedelia, ramshackle rockabilly, art rock, prole pop, machine-tooled motorik, raw Beefheartian angularity, solid blocks of noise – the lyrical concerns and approaches remain constant.

Smith is a gifted collagist, his texts incorporating quotes from other fictional worlds: films, song lyrics and novels. Several works display the influence of sci-fi and horror authors Philip K Dick, Ursula K Le Guin, Arthur Machen and especially HP Lovecraft. From the description of the antagonist in "The NWRA", *"Body a tentacle mess"*, to the line *"gargoyles and drummers awkwardly descend to great terror"* on The Fall's final album *New Facts Emerge*, Mark's acute sense of the gothic never leaves him.

While most rock lyricists strive for universality, Mark perversely grounds his work within Lancashire and Cheshire. Morrissey and others may have romanticised Manchester, but it's difficult to imagine locations such as Haslingden, Bury or Accrington appearing in the songs of any rock band other than The Fall. The geographic specificity is far more redolent of the folk music tradition – another mode of expression rooted in storytelling.

His first person songs are seldom written from his own viewpoint. He prefers to assume different characters: the disillusioned middle-aged suburbanite of "Living Too Late", the frightened farm hand of "Hurricane Edward", the East German drug dealer of "What About Us?". In other songs, he appears to be observing from a great distance, like Lovecraft's Yog-Sothoth, trapped outside the world, yet watching events unfold with an unblinking caustic gaze.

Some believe, post-80s, Mark abandons narrative, his lyrics becoming somehow less worthy of scrutiny. This is, to put it succinctly, wrong. The stories continue, but they are increasingly experimental and abstracted. Take for example 1993's "Service": a tale of mind transference between a youth and an ageing man. Or the daytime TV sci-fi of "Is This New" on *Imperial Wax Solvent*, with its tale of Time Blenders and the Department of No Name.

It would be easy to become bound up in the notion of Mark as short story writer, operating behind enemy lines, in the world of rock music. Yet for every narrative Fall song, there are compositions such as "Bombast" or "Free Range" that, in a conscious echo of the vorticist poetry of Wyndham Lewis, operate as a series of elliptical declarations. Elsewhere, "The Aphid" details the moves of a potential dance craze, while "New Puritan" comes over like an incantation.

It is precisely Mark's ability to deploy so many different modes of expression that makes him such an exciting lyricist. His writings display the key indicators of postmodern literature: fragmentation, intertextuality, metafiction, temporal distortion, pastiche, authorial self reference, mixing of high and low culture, and rejection of definitive meaning or interpretation. I believe his closest literary analogue is William S Burroughs. The author's novels, like The Fall's songs, interlace characters and events from the recognisable world with occult, mystical and science fiction themes, while his cut-up and fold-in techniques use both his own and pre-existing texts to create unpredictable thematic and narrative juxtapositions.

As an avid Burroughs fan myself, I've always been fascinated by a line in the sleevenotes to 1983's *Perverted By Language*: "Smith applied cut-up technique literally to brain". So, in 2007, when Mark asks me to co-write a feature film script with him, I'm naturally keen to discuss his appreciation of the beat author.

Yet, as ever, Mark is resistant to being pinned down. "Was William Burroughs always a big influence?" "Yeah," Mark purses his lips and nods slowly. "But I was probably far more influenced by Bernard Manning." ○

Mark E Smith at the *NME* office, London, 1988

Bleddyn Butcher

Dedication not Medication

Producer Craig Leon recalls how the mid-period group forged order out of studio chaos

By Craig Leon

If you've read some of the other accounts of life in and around Mark E Smith and The Fall, you would be expecting to read a narrative filled with anecdotes of "drunkenness and cruelty" (apologies to Ray Davies – one of the major influences on Mark) in an account by someone who worked on three albums, numerous singles and EPs with them.

Though that might have been the case for some, I'm sorry to disappoint, but though substance abuse was rife, not usually in the studio itself, and there were a couple of health scares for Mark along the way, that wasn't the case for us when my musical cohort, Cassell Webb and I worked with The Fall from 1989–92 in the *Extricate*, *Shift-Work* and *Code: Selfish* era. Yes, Mark was idiosyncratic (to say the least), and though he signed one of the books that he gifted to us as "Mark 'Difficult' Smith", he was not at all difficult in most of our dealings with him.

Mark was definitely, singularly in charge of shaping his own work and had concrete ideas regarding the message he was trying to convey in his lyrics. It was a different story when it came to shaping the music that the band provided for his lyrical concepts. Translating his ideas to the musicians who were working with him was done in a unique way. Mark came up with loose sonic ideas for the songs in many different ways, but his usual method was to instruct one or more of the core members of the band to come up with something musical that reflected what he was thinking the song or sound piece should be like. This often included singing bits of a newly imagined melody line, bassline or rhythm that he wanted them to emulate. Tracks were recorded, for the most part, live in the studio, with Mark shouting out cues and scratch ideas while everything else was going on. It usually clicked early on, but sometimes it sounded like chaos. In the end, things finally fitted together, sounding as though they were meant to be that way.

Alternatively, Mark would sometimes leave the players alone to come up with something. After a while, he'd come back and audition what they had created. Kicking around ideas until something clicked. When there were a few takes of the track, they were edited together and then Mark would overdub his vocals on them.

However, nothing is routine in recording. At other times, band members wrote virtually entire structures that were presented intact to Mark, which he then overdubbed on. Though other artists used this method in the studio (David Bowie, who I didn't work with, springs to mind) most of the artists I worked with before my involvement with The Fall didn't. Though Blondie developed a similar method on several of their recordings, theirs was a more methodical, researched approach that developed over long periods of time and experimentation.

I want to emphasise the band in this short space. The lyrical genius and creativity of Mark E Smith is self-evident as is the all-pervading force that unifies The Fall's work. However, when we recorded our albums I was extremely lucky to find a band that I thought was the most developed stage of The Fall that had existed to date. Craig Scanlon, Steve Hanley, Marcia Schofield, Si Wolstencroft and Martin Bramah, the early Fall member who rejoined to replace Brix Smith, were quite a powerful team and being long time veterans they provided the perfect foil for some of the most personal lyrics Mark had written. Though they had been working together in various incarnations over the years, it seemed to be exactly the right time for them to come together creatively. The unique blend of tight, perfect Northern soul grooves combined with radical guitar and keyboard work was exactly the right foil for the acerbic vocal and lyrical mindset of MES.

Regarding Mark and his talent, in retrospect I was privileged to have met and worked with him. Carrying sheets of paper or wadded-up scribbled notes into the studio to record his vocal, you never knew what to expect. It could be some of the most poignant, nastiest, most twisted or humorous uses of language in the world of rock.

Some personal memories. Mark's tutored tasting of rare old Scotch whiskies was quite a hoot. It took ages to recover.There were long, late discussions on literature, particularly ones concerning a mutual favourite author. A late night call was made to the Russian news agency TASS when we saw them beaming out raw footage of an alien walking around a city in Russia on an early satellite feed that was set up where we were at The Manor Studio. Questioned by Mark, the guy from TASS responded: "Sir, we are TASS. We don't make things up!" Sure... or maybe not?

Yes, people were hurt in the creation of The Fall's music, but the result was that The Fall albums were some of the most enjoyable projects I worked on since The Ramones. ○

Carry Bag Man

Memories of Mark E Smith from a radio fixer on Steve Barker's *On The Wire*

By Michael Fenton

In January 1985, I joined the team at Steve Barker's BBC Radio Lancashire show *On The Wire* as a gofer, telephone answerer and occasional contributor. The three hour show, as it was then, featured interviews, live sessions and outside broadcasts as well as the mix of dub reggae, On-U Sound, early Def Jam and anything else that took Steve's fancy.

It was arranged for The Fall to do a live broadcast from an outdoor bandstand in the grounds of Lancashire's Clitheroe Castle. It sounds unlikely now, but there are films and a recently issued album to prove it.

There were 2000 people there, policed by one, solitary bobby. As 2pm approached when the show began, the band began their set. An emergency call came from Radio Lancashire's outside broadcast to say the band had to stop playing due to some recording glitch.

I was tasked with going on the stage to ask Smith to stop the band playing. Who in their right mind would want that job? Still, it had to be done, and I walked up gingerly to Mark to pass on the message. I don't recall his actual wording, but I was thrown off stage without any actual physical contact. I'm not sure how he achieved that feat. Of course, they just carried on playing.

A couple of subsequent times in the late 1980s and early 90s, he came on the show on a Sunday afternoon to talk to Steve Barker and play some tunes. On one of these occasions, he played a selection of rockabilly records and imparted his knowledge of them.

I picked him up from his house in Prestwich on two occasions, both times in my green and white Citroën 2CV – not your usual chauffeur driven rock star type transport. He never batted an eyelid at that car, it could have been a Rolls Royce for all he cared.

One of the occasions sticks in my memory. The show started at 2pm, so I called at his house about an hour before. Brix let me in, Mark was still in bed. So I waited downstairs in the lounge. The floor had bits of paper and torn up fag packets on it with snatches of lyrics on them.

Mark came down eventually, put his jacket on and walked out of the door to my car. As we drove through Prestwich, he directed me to stop outside a little pub, He had two pints of bitter and

seemed to be on nodding terms with the clientele.

Despite his reputation, he was nothing but as good as gold on the drive to Blackburn. He asked about my family and what I did for a job, and I hope there's a song about me somewhere in the back catalogue.

When the show finished at 5pm, we returned to my car, and before I set off, he asked me if I wanted any "Billy". I enquired what this might be. He told me it was "Billy whizz". I declined his offer. He said, "Go on, you won't get addicted." ○

North West Fashion Show

Mark E Smith's tempestuous relationship with northern England is the backdrop for calling out decadence and hypocrisy

By Spenser Tomson

""Hit The North" has a dual meaning," said Mark E Smith in a 1988 issue of Dave Haslam's fanzine *Debris*, "Punish it or go there." However, it's not always clear which Smith personally would prefer. His own Northernness is stubborn and contrary. If Smith is an icon of the North, he is so without conforming to the usual stereotypes and tropes.

He expresses a considerable amount of disdain for the place. On "Industrial Estate", Smith scatters lines such as *"the crap in the air will fuck up your face"* – possibly a reference to Barton Dock, an industrial area of Manchester – in the song's guts. On "Cheetham Hill" it's more caustic and sustained – *"See the fleet of cruising cars/Go past the stations and the bars/ Never stop to get out/In case they choose to cruise about"* – positing the Mancunian suburb as a kind of dullard cousin to Betjeman's poem *Slough*, where men with *"double chins who always cheat and always win"* are replaced with loser cheaters who *"won't need to go berserk"* as long as no one scratches their obnoxious car.

Smith dabbles with the Northern trope of anti-Southern sentiment. On "Leave The Capitol", it is built around vague traces of hipsterism – *"The tables covered in beer/Showbiz whines, minute detail/Hand on the shoulder in Leicester Square"*. The tone suggests that this is to be expected of the soft South, but when similar traits are identified in the North, they become insufferable. On "Quit iPhone", Smith filters his venom through a scatting diatribe which ends *"and I see the citadel of Media City shining bright"*. Smith's vitriol is directed less at native Northerners, more those gauche invaders who have hit the North after the relocation of major parts of the BBC to Salford Quays – grotesquely haircutted creatives strolling over shining piazzas, heads down into smart phones. Smith sees this new Northerner like he saw Tony Blair's New Labour hanging out with pop stars: sickening.

Hints of this new, backwardly brash North are scattered through The Fall's songs: the problematic architectural metaphor of "Victoria Train Station Massacre", the baffling references to serial killer Harold Shipman in "What About Us?", the talk of Manchester's club scene in "50 Year Old Man". However, despite choosing to live in the North, here he is, slinging out caustic criticisms from the back room of a Prestwich boozer, Oscar The Grouch in Salford. Like those people who think only they are allowed to say derogatory things about their hometown, MES wants to simultaneously "punish" the North and "go there". ○

He Pep!

The Fall's acerbic stage chit-chat borrowed the cadence of stand-up but with extra alienation effect

By Stewart Lee

Mark E Smith's on stage banter, typically, enjoyed an oppositional relationship to the traditional notion of between-song chit-chat. Devoid of "Hello Cleveland!" mateyness, nearly every show began with Smith's formal announcement: "Good Evening. We are The Fall." Like a vet arriving at a Peak District farm to put some malformed animal out of its misery.

In later years this opening line became appended with comic variations. Indeed, Bob Nickas & Nikholis Planck's book of Smith banter *Slang King* poignantly closes with the 2013 anti-announcement: "We are The Fall. Don't think you are going to get anything else." The last tinned soup in the pantry served up to a sad child. "It's so good to be in Wales!" Smith declared, with uncharacteristic positivity, in April 2004, when taking the stage in Newport... Newport, Kentucky.

Other musicians might thank an audience, reveal a song's meaning or, in the rare cases of Patti Smith, Richard Dawson or Will Gaines, manage genuinely amusing anecdotes. But Smith's remarks, while bearing the rhythm and cadence of jokes ("They say nothing ever changes, and that's certainly true of The Lyceum!" – The Lyceum, London, 1982), usually only complicated matters and increased the tension. "So you've not fixed that pipe yet," he announced, a propos of nothing, to an audience in Liverpool nine days earlier. It's like something Smith's beloved old school funnyman Bernard Manning might say, but there was no apparent pipe, and nothing that could be mistaken for a pipe.

A rare moment of stand-up style interaction with a punter, foolishly requesting an old song, on the 1980 live album *Totale's Turns*, concludes, inconclusively: "Are you doing what you did two years ago? Well, don't make a career out of it." It has the beat of a heckle put-down, but is both a threat and a piece of gnostic advice.

Where did this quick wit approach emerge from? While happy to be viewed as a great artist, Smith was also obtusely keen to claim kinship with club entertainers, nostalgically mindful of Working Men's Club culture. Indeed, at the time of his death, he was working on a song with the stand-up Tim Vine, whose punishingly hilarious pun-heavy work The Fall frontman enjoyed. Vine's suggested title "Baseball Security Guard" (*"He sees all the games for free!"*) was misremembered by Smith as "Beachball Security Guard" – a better and more Fall-ish title, but one that emerges, tellingly, from the chance meeting, backstage at London's The 100 Club, of a comedian and a punk survivor.

Smith assured Vine he loved the rough outline of a recording he sent, and had already written four lines, but these are now lost, like Smith's between song banter itself, slicing the moment, and that moment only, and then dissolving on contact with air. ○

Tuff Life Boogie

The Fall and Michael Clark danced along the precipice of 1980s Britain

By Louise Gray

Before they even met, The Fall and the dancer Michael Clark were aware of each other. For Clark, the driving grind of The Fall's music combined with the rigorous aesthetic from his Royal Ballet training inspired the spectacular post-punk ballet he choreographed for his own company. For Mark E Smith's then wife and Fall guitarist Brix Smith in particular, it was the explosive energy of Clark – this latter-day Nijinsky, sprite and ethereal spirit – combined with his tutu and punked-up leather jackets and mohawk.

When Clark and The Fall did finally meet and began working together in 1984, it wasn't the mismatch that many assumed. While The Fall were a long way away from Clark's vibrantly danced (and lived) world, a place inhabited by performance artist Leigh Bowery, film maker Cerith Wyn Evans, the designers of BodyMap and the habitués of the (nearly) anything-goes London nightclub Taboo, in sound, the band and the dancer worked well together. The sharp edges of The Fall's music translated well into Clark's angular postures, which, in turn, were influenced from a summer school spent with Merce Cunningham in New York. Likewise, the stream of images, sonic, gestural and concrete: Mark E Smith's lyrics, often a free association of ideas and sounds, found their match in Clark's explosive staging. The dancing tins of Heinz beans, the giant revolving burger, the giant chips that shower the stage of Clark's *I Am Curious, Orange* (1988) (The Fall released their soundtrack as *I Am Kurious Oranj* that same year) are of a piece with Smith's linguistic fluidity.

The Michael Clark Company regularly took musical inspiration from outsider sources (Laibach, Public Image Ltd and Wire among them), but Clark kept returning to The Fall. A continual stream of iconoclastic performances followed. On a broadcast of "Lay Of The Land" on BBC TV's *Old Grey Whistle Test* in 1984, the musicians are at the back, creating an energetic wall of sound against which the dancers ricochet, Clark himself unforgettable in a BodyMap unitard with his bum exposed. The same year, Clark's ensemble piece *New Puritans* became the first full-length work choreographed to The Fall's music. (The title comes from the band's 1980 album, *Totale's Turns (It's Now Or Never)*); Charles Atlas filmed the sequences of the ballet for *Hail The New Puritan*, a mock documentary that explores a day in the life of Clark and in which Mark E and Brix Smith have loquacious cameos.)

As late as 2001, Clark was still enmeshed in Fall music: check the full stage show *Before And After: The Fall*. More intimate images of one section of the show are available online via grainy mini-cam footage of a performance to "Copped It" in central London's Notre Dame Hall for the fig.-1 art season. (These can be seen in Simon Pentleton and Josephine Soughan's limited edition publication *Michael Clarke: Dancing To The Fall*.) In this raucous, shaky recording, there's a sense that Clark and music are both united in a transcendent mosh pit, together grasping for a new and direct form of cultural invention. ○

Simon Pentleton & Josephine Soughan's *Michael Clark: Dancing To The Fall* is published by Everyday Press

The Fall with Michael Clark's dance company on *The Old Grey Whistle Test*, 1984

House Of All

Ex-Fall members united in the wake of Mark E Smith's death to preserve the group's intuitive experimentation in a new democratic era

By Tessa Norton
Photography by Christopher Nunn

The Frenz Experiment

"There's no such thing as repetition," Martin Bramah tells me. It's blazing sunshine on the April afternoon when we meet. The pub is cosy and has remained unchanged for years, but outside the Manchester skyline is constantly climbing higher, always morphing and pushing up. New towers glint in the sun; everything in the city seems to be growing taller and shinier in real time.

"If you keep playing the same thing, the whole world is changing around you all the time," Bramah continues. "The world reacts to the repetition and changes what it is. So you can't have repetition even if you play the same thing because everything changes in relation to it." Paul Hanley agrees. "It's like the John Cage thing," he nods. "It's *never* silent."

House Of All are Martin Bramah, Pete Greenway, Paul Hanley, Steve Hanley and Simon Wolstencroft. They are a new band, and are also 7.6 per cent of the people who have played in The Fall. You could say they went to the same school, just not all at the same time.

There have been Fall reunions before, of course – House Of All's members have recently played in other groups in The Fall's extended universe. Paul Hanley and Steve Hanley are alumni of Brix & The Extricated, as well as Martin Bramah's Factory Star in the 2000s, while the last Fall line-up including Greenway have been playing as Imperial Wax. But this time the members agreed they wanted to take a different approach. "Martin was billing it as more of a project than a band," Steve Hanley tells me over the phone. "It has turned into a band, but you know, it was just: go and see what we can do."

"I suppose it started with me," explains Bramah. "The idea that it would be good to draw in some ex-Fall members specifically, but with the idea that I wanted to do something more spontaneous and improvise. To capture a certain aspect of The Fall that I thought was the most interesting in some ways, if you take away that Mark E Smith's not involved, which was being able to think on your feet and come up with stuff."

Paul Hanley chimes in: "Early on, I don't think you thought the line-up was going to be as set as it was, did you? You thought it was going to be a bit more fluid?" Bramah nods: "Initially the idea was like, here's a project for anyone who's been in The Fall. There was an open door, different ex-Fall [people] coming in and out. Which is a nice idea, but it's not really practical. So it coalesced into these five people."

Talking to them now, the bright Manchester sunshine illuminating any dark corners of the past, it's clear that the formative experience of being in The Fall is something that all five members of House Of All internalised to such a degree that they barely even need to think of it consciously any more. It's a set of principles, ways to be in the world. And it's for this reason that House Of All was conceived as a project to make non-Fall music inspired by Fall rules – as though those rules are something that exist independently of the band, like laws of nature which scientists have observed and noted down, rather than invented. Immediacy, pressure, under-preparing. It's as though everything they've learned from being in that group, even at various times in history, has taught a series of lessons. Like film makers Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg's Dogme95 manifesto, the imprint of The Fall is a set of austere dictums about constraint, decisiveness and work ethic.

House Of All in Manchester, April 2023: (from left) Paul Hanley, Si Wolstencroft, Steve Hanley, Martin Bramah

The group name is an English translation of a Latin inscription on a mausoleum which Bramah had been drawn to; their track "Dominus Ruinea" also riffs on Latin. A mausoleum as a house that contains all; death as a leveller. The F-A-L-L hidden inside the name was accidental, but once Bramah spotted it he was keen to retain it as a coded link to the past.

Their self-titled album was largely created during an intense three days. With a two drummer line-up (longterm Fall members Paul Hanley and Si Wolstencroft, who have never played together before) and Steve Hanley's basslines, it's built of the same bricks as various classic Fall albums. However, as their last guitarist Pete Greenway's guitar interplays with that of their first, Martin Bramah, it's clear this is not a heritage act at all.

"Musically, Pete is a great icing on the cake addition," declares Bramah. "He was the last person we asked and it was it was just a perfect addition." Greenway's time in The Fall doesn't overlap with any of the others – he was part of the relatively stable final line-up, and the others didn't know him at all. "We kind of knew how it would work, with Martin and Paul and Si," Steve Hanley admits. "But Pete was the unknown. Because basically, I was thinking that he's been in a band with Mark for ten years! I bet Mark's been slagging us off in hotel rooms all round the world. What the hell does this guy think of us? But no, he didn't mind. Or if he did, he didn't let that colour his opinion."

And now we have an album, *House Of All*. It opens with crashing drums on "Aynebite", and an arresting Steve Hanley bassline which feels like unexpectedly running into someone you haven't seen in years. It's a tight set of eight songs which covers a huge amount of ground. Amid the familiar elements there are also some very un-Fall tricky melodies, heavy *Neu! '75*-style layers of guitar and a persistent, loping groove. Across tracks like "But Wilful I Am" and "Minerva Disrobed", the lyrics are intriguing; where Smith would often seem to be channeling a high priest loudly commanding the elements, Bramah taps into a different esoteric energy, something quieter and more covert. *"I never gave up on you"*, he intones on "Turning Of The Years".

The result is almost like those historical anachronisms in the TV show *Sapphire & Steel* – you listen to it expecting to hear what you heard in the past, but everything's changed. Perhaps the oddest thing about it is how it contains many elements of classic Fall but executes almost all of them differently – and how little it sounds like the old group. Sure, there are driving, repetitive rhythms, choruses and hooks, chants, spoken word, obscure lyrics, a sarcastic spikiness mixed with something more literary. But the album is surprising and confident in its own right. Perhaps the most Fall-like thing about it is that they did the bulk of the work in three days, and have their second album almost finished already. At time of writing, the group were about to embark on a UK tour – Greenway has announced he will not be attending for personal reasons, and a replacement is being sought.

"That first morning [in the studio] we turned up and I was like, what the fuck have I done?" confesses Bramah. "Getting your first coffee in... why?!? It's madness. But it came together." It's clear that not knowing how it would turn out was an essential part of the project. "Martin's way of wanting to do it, which we had done with The Fall – well, not every time, but quite a bit," recalls Steve Hanley, "is that we'd just go in the studio to do an album and we'd only have maybe five or six songs ready. And then just work on the other three in the studio. People's ideas. Martin wanted to have a go at that, do the whole album like that."

Bramah elaborates: "We were going for something minimal, kind of motorik, you know. And just kind of sticking to it and going off on tangents, just getting everyone locking in and see where it took us. And stopping after five or six minutes." Working against the clock, establishing creative constraints, was clearly something they all understood as essential to a post-Fall way of working. "I just thought that'd be fun," says Bramah. "The Fall often had to work under pressure. Quite often that pressure was provided by Mark's attitudes and demands. Not having Mark, the pressure was: no rehearsals, and just go in and see what we had."

Paul Hanley adds that studios are "not cheap places. You don't make stuff up in a place that's charging you £40 an hour, normally. So that was it. It was an artificial pressure, in a way, but it's a good one."

"I tried to get Marc Riley," Bramah says of the project's beginnings back in 2022. I kind of imagined *Hex Trials*, basically *Live At The Witch Trials* and *Hex Enduction Hour* as kind of the working idea for it. I wanted to improvise elements of both of those albums. Long songs. But Riley wouldn't do it. He's retired due to public demand, he said."

It becomes clear that there are more ghosts in this house than just Mark E Smith's. While Bramah had originally imagined that the band could be an almost infinite rotating cast of ex-Fall members, some of those spectral presences loom larger than others. "Craig didn't want to do it," Bramah sighs. He had approached Craig Scanlon, the guitarist who left in the mid-1990s, and the ex-member who Smith himself had perhaps missed the most. Everyone misses Craig, it seems. "Craig did some thinking. He certainly hadn't picked up a guitar for ages, is what he told me. I think he didn't want to blot his copy book." After all, Bramah adds, "he's got a perfect record". They all respected his decision, but after that, House Of All "was kind of on ice as an idea. Then I met Si [Wolstencroft] in a bar."

The two drummer line-up of The Fall had been the heartbeat of some of the most exciting moments in the group's history in the mid-1980s, a backbone of barely controlled chaos, a lot of noise, as well as a particularly fraught flashpoint for Smith's management style. Was the intention to have two drummers there from the beginning? "That was the lightbulb moment for me," says Bramah. "That's when I thought, I'll dig this up again," he adds to Paul Hanley, "and contacted you and Steve. Then the nucleus was there. Once you've got the two drummers it's going to be interesting."

"We've got a heritage but also no heritage. There's no 'we've got to play something from 1979'. We don't play anything that's old, but there's all sorts of backstory. I think that's quite unusual." Paul Hanley

"It was a big selling point for me," comments Paul. "I haven't done it since 1985, 1986. And I've known Simon for years, but we've never really played together. People talk about the two drummers in The Fall and you've got to go back and try and do that again, but not the same. It was quite daunting. But then I think that became its own challenge, which is a good thing."

Bramah interjects: "You'd both worked with Karl Burns separately. You really enjoyed the experience and Si really hated the experience, so Si was reluctant to do two drummers."

"I think you'll just find that I'm easier to work with, that's what it is," laughs Paul. "Karl and Simon *both* find me easier to work with, if I do say so myself. I had a wonderful experience, a wonderful and frightening experience, playing along with Karl. It was just a joy because he was one of my favourite drummers. When I started playing the drums, it was Karl Burns, John Maher and Steve Morris who were, still are, my three favourite drummers in the world. And Martin Bramah's my favourite guitarist, and he was two feet away from me in the club.

"To play with Karl was brilliant," he continues. "I mean, he's, you know, quite scary at times. But we did it. But we made it work. Because that was imposed on us. It was never our idea. It's what Mark said."

I get Wolstencroft's perspective on the phone a couple of days later. "I've never worked with Paul before," he reveals. "I've worked with Karl. I'm on the record in my book [*You Can Drum But You Can't Hide*] as saying I don't like having two drummers in the band!" This time it was different. "We got into a bit of chemistry, Paul and I, regarding the drums."

A spirit close to improvisation and quick-wittedness is at the

heart of what's made this project revelatory for House Of All's members. "The Fall had a unique working method, thanks to Mark's bloody mindedness," Bramah explains. "He had a vision and he kept chipping away at it all his life, to his credit, and we've all learned from that, that's what we had in common. So we've been using the principles developed in The Fall, but we're not imitating them. We are using what we've learned, in a fresh way. To imitate someone and learning from someone are two different things."

A big part of House Of All was to use that work ethic which they'd honed from years of working in quite extreme conditions. It was important, Bramah says, to preserve The Fall's "ability to mine a theme musically, rather than just noodling around improvising in that kind of jazzy kind of way where it can go anywhere", while also committing to an openminded and adventurous spirit, and an aversion to over-preparing. "We didn't rehearse at all," he explains. "We hadn't seen each other for ages. Hadn't written much music. I had couple of ideas, we all came in with a couple of ideas, to be developed. And we just set up the drum kits, miked everything up and then just started to play. Three days of just doing that and we'd written the album."

"You can't tell someone they're doing it wrong," adds Paul Hanley. "Because there is no wrong."

"We didn't get together," says Wolstencroft regarding contact between the band. "I actually wanted to get together beforehand but Martin said, 'no, we're just going to go in and do it,'" he laughs. "Well, we pulled it off!"

Perhaps the difference with their old group is a more egalitarian mindset, a level playing field. The Fall wasn't always a dictatorship. In the beginning, Bramah says, they perceived themselves as a collective. "That's why it's always referred to as a group, not a band, in those early days. A group of people." For Bramah – who was there before the beginning and left as it became clear that The Fall, for all their strengths, were not going to be a band known for their collective decision making – there's a potential for House Of All to explore how things might have developed if the wind had blown a different way.

"Lyrical obscurity is a Fall tradition. That's one thing I continue. I'm not dealing with the rational, I'm dealing with the subconscious and the irrational, you get a feeling, you get a mood." Martin Bramah

Listening to House Of All's album, it feels more like a splintered alternate timeline than a Fall sequel. What if the past had been different? What if doors had been left open, rather than slammed shut? Although he'd avoided thinking about it or discussing it too much in the past, some distance has given Bramah a useful degree of philosophical perspective on his time in The Fall. He's come to accept that "I am a part of what The Fall is. I was only in the band three years in total. The first two [albums], and a year into *Extricate*. But you know, I've been there at the inception, and I've known Mark before he was 'Mark E Smith'." You wonder how things would have had to be different for Prestwich teenagers Mark Smith and Martin Bramah to have been allowed to exist in the same group as equals, Bramah as Chris Bell to Smith's Alex Chilton, perhaps. The answer is, almost everything would have had to be different.

It's clear that House Of Fall's openended, off the cuff way of working is extremely different to their shared pasts. Here decisions are made quickly, but without ego. "In a way, it's not even improvised," says Bramah. "It's just coming up with an idea quickly. The whole thing of repetition and discipline." Steve Hanley agrees: "I'm not sure you would call it improvising." For him, it was more about decisiveness, learned from years of making snap decisions under pressure, but this time more co-operative. "We kind of quickly worked things out and stuck with them. We'd do the songs two or three times until everyone was happy. And then it would just stay as it was."

Lyrically too, Bramah knew he wanted to take a different approach to his songwriting in Blue Orchids or Factory Star. House Of All lent itself to a new process. "I'm experimenting more with words and using words in a different way to other things like Blue Orchids. I wrote a lot without thinking about music," he recalls. "I turned up with a lot of sheets of paper.

"I'm trying to work more from my subconscious rather than the conscious mind," he continues. "I want to take myself out of it." The resulting lyrics are a fascinating mixture of caffeinated hyper-focus and a looser literary style that recalls automatic writing. They have been a revelation to his bandmates. Finishing the songs has been, Paul Hanley says, "a real joy. You know, you have this piece of music and you think: that's brilliant, I'm really proud of that – and it comes back and it's five times better."

Steve Hanley "was pleasantly shocked. I wasn't there when Martin did the vocals." Of the songs they developed in the studio, he says, "I thought maybe some of them, given more time, these could be great. Maybe they're a bit rushed. And just a bit of a skeleton of a song. But after Martin had put all his guitar on, the vocals and everything, I was surprised at how good they sounded."

Ultimately, adds his brother, "you get the song and you think: what the fuck is that about? Which is great, you know. And, by the way, he's not going to tell us what it's about and I wouldn't want him to."

Lyrical obscurity is "a Fall tradition", adds Bramah. "Mark never explained his lyrics. That's one thing I continue. There's not a lot of point, because they're abstractions. It's not like a concrete rational message. I'm not dealing with the rational, I'm dealing with the subconscious and the irrational, you get a feeling, you get a mood. And that's all I expect you to get. It takes you into a certain place, and you can explore that."

Always different, always the same, goes the old Fall cliche. The artistic constraints House Of All have set themselves – to use Fall-like rhythms of work, the old rules, the employee handbook – have, paradoxically, been the key to setting them free creatively, to allowing them to make something new. There's no such thing as repetition, after all. In a music industry increasingly polarised between new and heritage acts, it's rare to see musicians of their generation pushing forward. They look at their former peers with some degree of detachment – on the one hand an act like New Order are playing huge gigs, on the other, equally beloved groups are barely scraping a living. "We've kind of got a heritage but also no heritage," muses Paul Hanley. "The people have, but there's no baggage here whatsoever. There's no 'we've got to play something from 1979'. So we don't play anything that's old, but there is all sorts of backstory. I think that's quite unusual." What's striking is their commitment to pushing forward, to making things new. Bramah agrees: "I think it's unusual that people our age are still trying to break new ground and do something very experimental by our standards. For our age group, lots of it is nostalgia. I just can't do that."

It makes sense that some degree of improvisation unlocked this for them. Finding experimentation later in life is something we associate more with jazz or experimental musicians than rock ones. For Steve Hanley, things also feel different now. "For one thing, I don't think we've got anything to prove as musicians. I think we've done it all. These days in music, there's not as much riding on it. The amazing thing is, there's still an audience for it. That gets me all the time."

It's also part of the project, the Fall-like way of doing things. "Part of our tradition is to keep moving," suggests Bramah. "We're continuing with that tradition but we're not trying to sound like we used to sound. We're just trying to keep going forward with new ideas." At the heart of it, the project echoes the old Heraclitus maxim that you can't step into the same river twice. "It's moving, the world's changing," says Bramah. "So, the repetition can't be repetition." ○

House Of All's *House Of All* is released by Tiny Global Productions

The Tonic 15 from 1–33

Ákos Rózmann
12 Stationer VI (Ideologic Organ)

Alex Dowling
Reality Rounds (Carrier)

Ben Johnston
String Quartet No 7: With Solemnity (New World)

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Aperture Duo
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Sult (Rune Grammofon)

Maria de Alvear
The Inner (Because Tomorrow Comes)

Morton Feldman
Piano And String Quartet (Nonesuch)

"Blue" Gene Tyranny
Timing (Lovely Music)

Compiled by Luke Fraser, host of *The Tonic*, podcast and radio show exploring contemporary classical music across genders and borders, thetonic.online, threadsradio.com

15 Records on Repeat

Peace Flag Ensemble
Noteland (We Are Busy Bodies)

Peace Flag Ensemble
Astral Plains (We Are Busy Bodies)

The Inbreds
Winning Hearts (Murderecords)

The Beach Boys
Pet Sounds (Capitol)

Nolan Strong with The Diablos
Mind Over Matter (Fortune)

Heshoo Beshoo Group
Armitage Road (We Are Busy Bodies)

Winston 'Mankunku' Ngozi
Yakhal'Inkomo (We Are Busy Bodies)

Barney Wilen
Zodiac (We Are Busy Bodies)

The Muffs
Blonder And Blonder (Capitol)

Ill Considered
Liminal Space (New Soil)

Oira Pena
Puna (We Are Busy Bodies)

Vanity Mirror
PUFF (We Are Busy Bodies)

Eiko Ishibashi
For McCoy (Black Truffle)

Vels Trio
Celestial Greens (Rhythm International)

El Khat
Albat Alawi Op 99 (Glitterbeat)

Compiled by Eric Warner of the We Are Busy Bodies label, Toronto, Canada, wearebusybodies.com

15 More Realistic Goals

DUP SYS
Madoromi (Muzan Editions)

yol
low energy bleak snarl (Bandcamp)

Jacqueline Humbert & David Rosenboom
"Talk 1" (Unseen Worlds)

GIANT HEAD
You Hold It With Love In Your Hands (Larry Crywater Productions)

BBC Sound Effects Library
"Maniacal Laughter" (BBC)

CynthLab featuring Isnaj Dui & Elina J
Ambient Punk Vol 2 (Bandcamp)

Jacken Elswyth
Banjo With The Sound Of Its Own Making (Fractal Meat)

Robbie Elizee
Eurojank (Bandcamp)

Orca, Attack!
CMSO (Learning By Listening Vol 1) (Strategic Tape Reserve)

Martha Maclaren
Remind My Sister To Fall In Love (Bandcamp)

Jelena Glazova & Georgy Zolotarev
Shining Under The Skin (Delta Shock)

Duma
Duma (Nyege Nyege Tapes)

Maalem Mahmoud Gania
Aicha (Hive Mind)

Iceboy Violet
The Vanity Project (2 B Real)

Sandra Cross
The MMs Bar Recordings (Trunk)

Compiled by Justin Watson and Rob Spencer of *More Realistic Goals*, a monthly show on Reform Radio, reformradio.co.uk

The Office Ambience

Abwärts
Superfucker (Off Ya Tree)

A Moi La Liberte: Early Electronic Raï: Algerie 1983–1990
Various (Born Bad)

Cliché Toupee
Clickbate Union (Bandcamp)

Paul B Cutler
Les Fleurs (In The Red)

Irreversible Entanglements
"Nuclear War" (Red Hot)

Gamardah Fungus
To The Stars And Back (Polar Seas)

Gateway
Galgendood (Transcending Obscurity)

Magnetizdat DDR Magnetbanduntergrund Ost/ East German Tape Underground 1979–1990
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(Edition Iron Curtain Radio/Major Label)

oyamao
Galo (Bison)

Robyn Rocket Steward
Ghost Train Yard (Bandcamp)

Saphron
Red Amber (Feeding Tube/Shagrat)

Mark E Smith
The Post-Nearly Man (Artful)

Lewis Taylor
The Damn Rest (Be With)

Naomi Yang
Never Be A Punching Bag For Nobody OST (20/20/20)

WORMMOTHER
Dysphoria Dystonia (Bandcamp)

Compiled from the playlists of *Wire* staff. To hear a stream of our Office Ambience, go to thewire.co.uk. We welcome charts from record shops, radio shows, DJs, venues, labels, musicians, readers, etc. Email a top 15 to charts@thewire.co.uk – the more unusual the better

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Temps

Roberto Brundo (Andrea Belfi); Willow Shields (Temps)

Soundcheck A–Z

New CDs, vinyl, downloads, streams

Nancy Andrews & Linda Smith
A Passing Cloud
Grapefruit/Gertrude DL LP

Linda Smith's excellent 2021 compilation *Till Another Time* served as a reintroduction to her remarkable DIY pop, made during the 1980s and 90s in Maryland. Now, the home recording pioneer returns with new music, which also represents a reconnection with an old friend and collaborator, the Maine based artist and musician Nancy Andrews.

Smith and Andrews lived together in the early 80s, collaborating on the short-lived projects Ceramic Madonna Head (With Plastic Arms) and The Gertrudes. They hadn't worked together in three decades when Smith reached out to Andrews to propose working on something new. The resulting record sticks closely to the lo-fi guitar and electronics that Smith is known for, with an intriguing lyrical premise – it's based on the lurid stories of pulp fiction, of which Andrews keeps a large collection.

The songs were recorded at a distance, passed back and forth from Andrews and Smith's respective homes, but the pair remain attuned to each other, most evidently when singing – see the harmonising of "In The Darkness Of Slumber". The musical arrangements also have a conversational quality, as with the noirish instrumental "LZ".

The song titles are evocative ("In The Darkness Of Slumber", "Room 435") and the lyrics have a gothic flourish that often contrasts with the steady guitar jangle. "The Whispering Cup" begins with a sample from 1940s noir film *The Lady Confesses*, before switching to a melancholy ballad that seems to voice the inner thoughts of a femme fatale. "Spare Me The Details" is an abstract portrait of a woman at the brink, an assemblage of speculative sentences pointing to an enigmatic incident (*"She couldn't face a scene/She really didn't care/It makes no difference now/ Whatever could it mean?"*).

Andrews and Smith began the songs by picking phrases from books and writing around them, and this feels like the process at its rawest. *A Passing Cloud* puts an unexpected twist on a familiar genre – a fruitful return for this musical pairing.
Claire Biddles

Martyna Basta
Slowly Forgetting, Barely Remembering
Warm Winters Ltd DL/LP

"She is afraid that as she ages her memory will become cloudy and silent, as it was in her first years of life, which she won't remember anymore." *The Years* by Annie Ernaux was the first book I instinctively reached for when listening to Martyna Basta's *Slowly Forgetting, Barely Remembering*. That universal sense of longing – and analysing that feeling – is where they connect. In the book, Ernaux writes about Godard, Citroën, the invention of contraception and student revolution as she moves through the decades. It is less a novel about the situations and events, more meditation about language's ability to capture memory and innermost human emotions. The type of book that sends you wandering down memory lane.

Basta's second album for Warm Winters Ltd is also evocative, and feels like flicking through a dusty photo album with blurred images. The Krakow, Poland based composer and classically trained guitarist – who first self-released her music back in 2020 – blends zither twangs and field recordings with improvised electroacoustic workings, digital rattles and watery textures.

Compared to 2021's *Making Eye Contact With Solitude*, Basta uses more vocals that sometimes sound otherworldly or faintly operatic. There is a weird tension throughout the album, as it meanders between benign and sinister, often inside one song – as in "Back And Forth". Led by harpsichord and paired with anxious breaths and stutters, the track culminates in a soothing guitar passage. The title track is built on a looped sentimental guitar melody with vocals murmuring *"Slowly forgetting, barely remembering"*, approaching from a distance to become close ear whispers, interwoven by strange hums.

The album is full of unsettling details that recall Félicia Atkinson; its diaristic ambient tone is close to Claire Rousay, who contributes Auto-Tuned vocals to "It Could Be As It Was Forever". Its hauntological qualities don't resort to cliches, and it is deeply poetic in spite of its sparse wordage.
Miloš Hroch

Andrea Belfi
Eternally Frozen
Bow/Maple Death CD/DL/LP

On display at The Museum of Jurassic Technology in Los Angeles is the story of a trapped Deprong Mori, a mythological bat originating in Northern South America that can fly through solid matter using its echolocation capabilities. The exhibit tells of Donald R Griffith's 1952 research trip there in which he sought – and supposedly succeeded – to trap a Deprong Mori inside an encasement. Like the image of a Deprong Mori shut inside of a box, watching time pass it by, Andrea Belfi's *Eternally Frozen* trods through heavy melodies, moving in circles that warp time.

The Berlin based, Italian born drummer and experimental musician's works often play with ideas of time and hypnosis using electroacoustic palettes. On *Eternally Frozen*, Belfi continues along this path, composing five pieces that employ Robin Hayward on tuba, Henrik Munkeby Nørstebø on trombone and Elena Kakaliagou on French horn alongside synthesizer sputters and percussive rhythms.

Most of its tracks are canons built from a looped and layered phrase. Much of the album uses a similar palette of trudging, brass based sustained notes. But there are a few surprising moments on those tracks that centre unexpected, groovy rhythms. "Exotica", for example, alternates resonant tones and high pitched squeals that weave between each other, resulting in a dramatic sound that grows with each added repetition. By the time frenetic drums enter, it feels even more impassioned.

Belfi's vision of the eternal is at its strongest on album closer "Golden". The track blooms from a very deep pitch, letting other low tones float in and around it. Here, time feels as if it's evaporated, leaving a swathe of brass. Instead of focusing on the motion of each circular, repeating pattern, the track is at once heavy and light, calling to mind the picture of the suspended Deprong Mori. It's like a guttural scream rising from the past, an eternal flame holding steady from one century to the next.
Vanessa Ague

Gerald Cleaver
22/23
577/Positive Elevation CD/DL/LP

Only three years ago, veteran jazz drummer Gerald Cleaver, noted for his work with the likes of William Parker and Roscoe Mitchell, made a striking detour with *Signs*, his first solo electronic album. But Cleaver's signature is already distinctive enough to feel decades in the making.

After *Signs*, Detroit native Cleaver set out for something best described as a reflection on techno rather than an iteration of it. Efforts to bridge jazz and techno vary wildly but Cleaver's success lies not in attempting to fuse or superimpose. Instead, the two forms become a framework around which something else can grow. This has a curious effect of making genre signifiers feel both vestigial and ever present.

Cleaver's third album in this vein spreads 22 tracks (on the digital version, other formats feature truncated tracklists) across a near three hour running time. Occasionally it makes you feel like you're in a network of infinite capillaries, a cosmos assembling itself in real time – or listening to a version of Autechre's *Confield* grown from gentle folds and curlicues instead of shards. However, there are big structural variations across and between tracks, with the use of 4/4 in the album's final third edging it closest to club music – see the likes of "Yeah", "Day And Night" and "31 Julys". The latter especially has the cut of a calling card track like Drexciya's "Bubble Metropolis" or Jeff Mills's "The Bells" silhouetted in the afterglow of house radiance.

The press blurb cites poet, philosopher and Cleaver collaborator Fred Moten discussing house music in terms of rootedness – not an abstract dialectic but an intimately felt one between feet and floor. What *22/23*

The 26th Sparks album finds the Mael brothers entering their 50th year with irony and inventiveness intact

By Dickon Edwards

Latte bloomers: Sparks

Sparks
The Girl Is Crying In Her Latte
Island CD/DL/LP/MC

50 years after the release of the first Sparks album, Ronald and Russell Mael are not only still practising their craft but are booked to play their biggest headline concert yet, at the Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles. It's tempting, therefore, to concoct theories for this success. One might be the band's ability to speak to those who feel left out of things, which is nearly everyone. The Maels certainly seem to offer a club of otherness which anyone can join, though it's also one where everyone thinks, "Only I truly get this band – just me. All the other fans are mistaken."

What is not in dispute, though, is their talent for channelling complexity through strong surfaces, not least the surface of humour. In interviews the Maels have bristled at the labels zany or camp, but their work is an illustration of the distinction between these terms. The film *Everything Everywhere All At Once*, for example, is zany rather than campy; it deals in the laboured involvement of wacky ideas. But Sparks are more campy than zany; they use ironic detachment, distance and space – the kind of space that can be a refuge. It's there in Russell's mannered vocals, which have invited comparisons with Tiny Tim. It's there too in Ron's cartoonish look of mustachioed, deadpan aloofness. As Sianne Ngai puts it in *Our Aesthetic Categories* (Harvard University Press, 2015), camp converts its sense of failure – such as the failure to conform to rock and pop convention – into "victory and enjoyment". Zaniness, says Ngai, "highlights its own inability to do this".

As it is, the humour of Sparks is never truly straightforward. On this new album, there's "We Go Dancing", a satire of North Korea which presents the military dictatorship as a kind of disco. Here, Kim Jong Un is portrayed as the ultimate DJ: *"Man, he rocks our world/Skrillex, maybe Diplo, they've got nothing on our dude"*. But the accompanying music is downright avant garde, with shrieking brass, marching sound effects and Russell singing at machine gun speed, as if in an unhinged Gilbert & Sullivan opera.

Despite their chart hits across the decades, it's only since *Lil' Beethoven* in 2002, with its maximalist mantras and synthetic orchestras, that Sparks have truly located their own niche and dug in, as opposed to joining in. *The Girl Is Crying In Her Latte* extends this territory, building on the spirit of 2020's *A Steady Drip, Drip, Drip* by being a further chocolate box assortment of styles. Nevertheless, this album feels more urgent and defiant than its predecessor. The opening title track, for instance, is short and sharp and has an abrasive, distorted techno beat reminiscent of Pan Sonic and Franck Vigroux, startling the listener with its oddball aggression.

One emerging theme is contemporary anxiety, whether social or global. It's not just one girl who is discovered clutching her drink unhappily, but the whole caffeinated world of precarity: *"So many people are crying in their latte"*. In "The Mona Lisa's Packing, Leaving Late Tonight", the titular painting, so synonymous with contentment, is equally stricken. This portentous image is set to an irresistibly swinging Andrews Sisters melody and housed in a vertiginous tower of infinite trumpets and drums.

There is a similar absurdist malaise in "Nothing Is As Good As They Say It Is", a catchy dose of bubblegum metal in the vein of Andrew WK, complete with an uproarious guitar solo. This time, a newborn baby takes one look at the world and demands to be allowed back into the womb: *"I can live with a lousy view"*.

Sometimes the anxiety is more personal. Two songs, "Escalator" and "You Were Meant For Me", are in the tradition of the Baudelaire passante, the yearning after the beautiful stranger in the public space. Both tracks have an alien cuteness to their synths, with Russell's otherworldly falsetto attaining a lonely poignancy.

In "Veronica Lake", a potted biography of the 1940s Hollywood star becomes a warning against the suppression of individuality. The song tells how the US government asked Lake to change her long peek-a-boo hairstyle, due to women factory workers imitating the look and putting themselves at risk of being caught in the machinery. The Maels argue that the hairdo's loss was *"a casualty of war"*. If this is a good joke, it's also one which posits questions about the function of role models and fashion.

When Sparks contrast these anxieties with relaxed bouts of pleasant crooning, such as "It Doesn't Have To Be That Way" and "It's Sunny Today", there is nevertheless still a note of archness: *"The locals resent/Our middle class bent"*. Similarly, closer "Gee, That Was Fun" modifies its review of a relationship – possibly from a deathbed – with a wry list of regrets: *"Wish I gave better compliments/Wish I loved Crime And Punishment"*. The song might also be read as the brothers comparing their own partnership to a marriage. They've done so before, after all, with the sleeve to 1982's *Angst In My Pants*, where Ron was in bridal drag. It's a funny image, but as with everything Sparks do, the idea is a departure point, never a destination. ○

Munachi Osegbu

demonstrates is that roots can still crack the city streets in unexpected and inspired ways.
James Gormley

Cold Comfort
All Power No Sour
Bandcamp DL
Cold
Bandcamp CD/DL
On previous release *Maximum Effort*, Northwich based multi-instrumentalist Ben Forrester aka Cold Comfort channelled small town restlessness via frenetic guitar grind and fuck-it vocals. On *All Power No Sour*, the riffage and restlessness remain, but they're broadened into sonic environments which incorporate scathing patches of something closer to suburban ennui.

"YLS" is a short vignette that boils and spits like a white-hot poker dropped into a pint of mild, its fizz and seethe drawn into something longer and more tortured on following track "Holy Channel". When Forrester escalates into the energetic riffage of "Level" or "Borderline Disaster" his basslines feel as though they are swaggering parochial high streets looking for a fight, soaked in an aggression which recalls Bob Vylan's *The Price Of Life* or even Mclusky at their wildest and most unhinged.

However, when paired with *Cold* – another recent release and the latest in a bunch of shorter EPs – Forrester matches growl and grind with delicate drone, creating something closer in feel to the work of Matt 'MXLX' Loveridge. But where the latter's work feels particularly Bristolian, Forrester conjures a rounded depiction of life in small Northern towns – familiar from my own years spent in similar locales – where fidgety aggression meets listless drone, underpinned by an overwhelming sense of boredom. The EP comprises three contrastingly delicate soundscapes. "Scotch Mist" and "Nesting" are twinkling swathes of groggy and illusory ambience, while on "Bin Night" he treats the ubiquity of the title's event like the night before Christmas, an anticipatory drone rising above preparatory clatter as polythene bags are put out with innocent hope, like a mince pie left out for Santa Claus.

Perhaps it's the humour, or the way his drones sometimes feel like an overcast sky, but Forrester's work resonates a definite, and defiant, Northernness. If consumed together, psychogeographical clues are fleshed out into a fully rounded whole – the anger and seethe of the first record, the aimless drift of the second. However, neither ever reclines into the easy trope of Northern England as somewhere dull; the former finds purpose in the mundane and everyday, the latter finds beauty from floating in it.
Spenser Tomson

Mark Dresser
Tines Of Change
Pyroclastic CD/DL
For Dresser, the contrabass is not simply an orchestral instrument, but an orchestra in itself. He has long experimented with additions and preparations, which don't so much add to the instrument's already oceanic range of tones, textures and depths, as make the sounds a bassist hears when playing solo available to a listening audience.

All the way back to 1995's superb *Force Green* – one of the most underrated jazz records of the 1990s – Dresser has been an important composer as well as an accompanying bassist known for his work with Arthur Blythe and Anthony Braxton. And while most jazz bassists seldom go beyond A–B in the instrument's lexicon, Dresser has drawn on the lessons of the great Bertram Turetzky, then fused those with Charles Mingus's positioning of the bass rather than drums and horns at the heart of the jazz combo. Then, as every man born in 1952 must, he found himself turned around by Jimi Hendrix's transformation of what is possible with a bunch of strings and a few switches.

Out of all that, *Tines Of Change* is born. The title refers to the metal strips attached to a secondary bridge, which, plucked or bowed, give off an mbira or vocal effect. But, of course, the natural misreading of the title is important to an artist who has always been significantly responsive to current events. His titles this time don't directly reference our parlous state, as "Bosnia" did on *Force Green*, but the album gives off a strong sense of Dresser's desire to recentre and retune lives. There is nothing quite like "Bacahaonne" on his earlier solo *Unveil*, but "Gregoratyne" carries an unmissable echo of Gregorian chant, while "Narratone" seems to delve into the complex language of throat singing. "Harmonity", "Melodine" and "Tynalogue" might suggest exercises or test pieces – in truth they're anything but. Likewise "Prolotine", which isn't merely a threshold piece of technical interest, but a glimpse of Dresser's whole sound world in exquisite miniature.
Brian Morton

Paul Dunmall Ensemble
It's A Matter Of Fact
Discus CD/DL
Paul Dunmall has long been a Coltrane disciple. He visited the US and rehearsed with Alice. As he explained in a feature in *The Wire* 471, he toured with Johnny 'Guitar' Watson in the 1970s, who asked him to "cool" his free jazz warm-up routine a little. Inspired by John's late recordings, he was a founding member of Spirit Level, and played in Keith Tippett's improv quartet Mujician. That affiliation is apparent in his latest release, a follow-up to *Yes Tomorrow* by his Birmingham quintet, released on Discus last year.

The new album features a suite for expanded group that mixes tight compositions and openended improvisation. Dunmall is on tenor and soprano saxophones, with Julie Tippetts (voice), Martin Archer (alto and baritone saxophones), Charlotte Keeffe (trumpet), Richard Foote (trombone), Steven Saunders (guitar), James Owston (bass) and Jim Bashford (drums).

The eventful and episodic "Calling The Spirits" has a strong ecstatic vibe, and features the free improv vocalising for which Tippetts is best known. That vocalising also appears on the opening minutes of "Purple Dance" – which then develops a groove that includes a powerful solo by Steven Saunders on electric guitar. But there's memorable song material too, including the dreamy, languorous "Golden Boat" with Tippetts scatting and the catchy "Don't Ask Why".

"Latu/Reunion" is squally free jazz with prominent vocalising, that – characteristically for this album – develops an infectious groove. "It's A Matter Of Fact/Ahimsa/Dreaming Again" is the longest track at 19 minutes. It opens with a gamelan sounding theme, and includes a John Coltrane style tenor sax plus drums duet and solo guitar. The track is a fitting conclusion to a joyous, uplifting release by one of the most passionate and committed jazz improvisors.
Andy Hamilton

Fire! Orchestra
Echoes
Rune Grammofon 2xCD/DL/3xLP
Even in Fire! Orchestra's prehistory – when Johan Berthling, Mats Gustafsson and Andreas Werliin converged in the 2000s as rocking free jazzers Fire! – the trio were rarely what you'd call self-contained, with guest performers a regular occurrence on their releases. A 2012 concert in Stockholm swelled them to an implausible 28 members and became the debut Fire! Orchestra album. Contemporary jazz of this abrasive stripe rarely has the capacity – or perhaps the ambition – to go the big band route, but this ensemble just keep growing, with 43 musicians credited on *Echoes* across almost 90 minutes.

Some of them, indeed, were past Fire! collaborators. David Sandström, best known for drumming in Swedish hardcore band Refused, notches a vocal and composer credit on "Lost Eyes In Dying Hand" where both the big band format and the free jazz sensibilities explode into view in a cacophonous intro and outro. "To Gather It All. Once." (these gnomic titles, one learns, pay homage to mid-20th century Swedish writer Erik Lindegren) is piano-driven and low-lit, Mariam Wallentin's vocals barely surpassing a whisper. And Jim O'Rourke, though not a performer here, mixed and sequenced the album, making him as significant a mood alterer as many musicians, on an album with 13 saxophonists and five clarinettists.

While there's no obvious structural pattern to the record – the album's seven longest tracks comprise the "Echoes" suite, but are haphazardly interspersed with shorter segments – it dips and flows elegantly, and earns its running time. Glossy strings pre-empt loft-jazzy shaker percussion, an almost post-punk bassline (on "Cala Boca Menino") occurs a few minutes before a stripped back bass improvisation with a blunt tone not wholly unlike the Ethiopian begena. Best comes last: "I See Your Eye, Part 2", enlivened by Joe McPhee's spoken paean to *"the last of the late great finger-wigglers"*, is preposterous, riotous and righteous.
Noel Gardner

Fourth World Magazine III
Neoplatonic Aquatic Symposiums
Poole Music DL/LP
Neotropicalist Spencer Clark releases a third edition of his Fourth World Magazine project, *Neoplatonic Aquatic Symposiums*. The title

of first track "Human Gaze + Hermanubis = The Veolcity Of Angels" more or less sums up the vibe – across mangled ecclesiastical synthesizer, disembodied voices chant and exhale while energy bursts break and scatter just above. It's as though Clark is attempting to coax some vaporous entity from inside of a Walkman, before "Flythoughts" elongates the ferric wobble and glitch into a longer swathe of drone.

Like the work of Grant Corum and the musicians who release material via his Psychic Sounds label, the titles here all plug into a lexicon of mind-bent revelation, such as "Supernatural Hall Of Interaction" or the darker, bad trip tropes of "Daemonic Holomovement Of Iamblichus". Clark is a kind of perpetual notion machine, the titles and themes of his work cycling through snippets of pseudoscience and classical antiquity, plundering the edges and corners of concepts, amalgamating them to flesh out his peculiar universe.

While Clark's work has occasionally taken a more documentarian format – as on 2016's incredible *The Stimulated Australia*, which juxtaposed a pair of field recordings from natural and synthetic environments – the pieces here are closer to his work as Typhonian Highlife, freeform and abstract mixtures which pulsate and recede, eking out the weirdest elements of those tropical soundscapes.

As the album capitulates, powering through layers of Clark's recognisable shimmer and haze, "Motion Of ALC" plateaus into a kind of post-trip epiphany drone, an emotionally sated state after the heady mixtures which precede. These moments are what Clark does best, pushing Jon Hassell's definition of Fourth World music as a combination of the primitive with the futuristic to the limit of its potential. The result is a universe whose landscapes and lore are a pleasure to explore.

Spenser Tomson

Godflesh
Purge
Avalanche CD/DL/LP

Streetcleaner gets all the love, but 1992's *Pure* is the best Godflesh album. Incorporating ideas from hiphop and ambient music, and bringing in second guitarist Robert Hampson (newly ex-Loop, pre-Main) while remaining resolutely the vision of mastermind Justin K Broadrick, it lives up to its title, crushing the listener under its treads with precise, single-minded intensity, then wafting away on a poison cloud of bad vibes during its 21 minute closing track "Pure II ".

Purge is seemingly intended as, if not a sequel to *Pure*, then its spiritual and conceptual descendant. Like the earlier album, many of its beats are drawn from hiphop, giving tracks like "Nero", "Land Lord" and "Army Of Non" the floor shaking feel of someone trying to shake their ass while wearing lead boots, while the uptempo "Permission" brings to mind the techno experiments of

Three distinctive approaches to post-bop piano from Aruán Ortiz, Alexander Hawkins and Marie Krüttli

By Andy Hamilton

Aruán Ortiz Trio
Serranías: Sketchbook For Piano Trio
Intakt CD/DL
Marie Krüttli
Transparence
Intakt CD/DL
Alexander Hawkins Trio
Carnival Celestial
Intakt CD/DL

Three piano albums from Swiss label Intakt that offer three distinctive takes on post-bop freedom. Most rooted in mainstream post-bop – though highly individual nonetheless – is Aruán Ortiz's *Serranías*. Alexander Hawkins radically reconceives the jazz piano trio, while Marie Krüttli offers lyrical free improvisation.

British pianist Alexander Hawkins's trio features Neil Charles (bass) and Stephen Davis (drums). It was formed in 2012, and as Bill Shoemaker's sleevenotes argue, continues to stretch the jazz piano trio's horizons. Jazz grooves predominate, but they're given abstract colourings often taken from free improv and contemporary composition. The edgy "Sarabande Celestial" is only remotely related to the stately baroque dance, with pungent lines and stabbing chords against subdued but eerie electronics. "Unlimited Growth Increases The Divide" is a slow ballad, more lyrical than dirge-like. "Fuga, The Fast One" has increasingly furious piano over a thunderous bass pedal point. "Canon Celestial" is free piano and bass against mechanically ticking drums. A stellar release.

Marie Krüttli comes from French-speaking Switzerland. She began as a classical pianist, but got interested in jazz. *Transparence* is her first solo album. As she explains in an online interview – Google translated from French – "Silence and space are necessary for improvised music. This allows inspiration to come to us". She cites Craig Taborn and Jason Moran as influences, but on this evidence, they're closer to jazz than she is. The Bösendorfer piano she plays is a less common choice of instrument, but she likes its warmth.

In other projects Krüttli uses electronic effects, but the textures here are purely acoustic. There are some preparations – on "Departure", she placed an old key in the piano, inducing shimmering and rattling effects. The sublimely slow "Exploration" is freely but lyrically ruminative, with prominent use of the sustain pedal. Throughout, the playing is open, lucid and plangent, an outstanding example of melodic free improv.

Aruán Ortiz, from Santiago de Cuba, is a leading presence in New York avant jazz, whose work has its roots in Cuban tradition. *Serranías*, an impressive trio album with bassist Brad Jones and veteran drummer John Betsch, marks the pianist's 50th birthday. Its Cuban toques, rumba and Afro-Haitian influences colour post-bop jazz. Montunos – a kind of ostinato or vamp – are a motif.

The album highlight is a hugely exciting interpretation – or rather, deconstruction – of bebop anthem "Shaw 'Nuff" by Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie. The classic misterioso opening vamp is extended to three minutes, followed by a theme statement that soon lurches almost into atonality. "Memorias Del Monte" has a rapid motoric theme that becomes increasingly fragmented and free. The haunting and very slow "Lullaby For The End Times" is rather reminiscent of Charlie Haden's composition "Silence". While David Virelles is for me the most outstanding of a remarkable group of Cuban pianists – also including Gonzalo Rubalcaba, Chucho Valdés, Hilario Durán – Ortiz runs him close. A challenging and very rewarding listen. ○

Piano magic: Aruán Ortiz Trio

Palma Fiacco

the *Slavestate* EP and the remixed singles from 1994's *Selfless*. The album's first half is simultaneously some of Godflesh's most aggro material and as gleaming and chromed as a Terminator that's been burned down to its metal skeleton.

Purge isn't a completely boom-bap orientated album, though. "Lazarus Leper" is both one of the album's longest tracks and one of its most old school. The primitive drum machine beat sounds like something that could have come off the group's very first EP, and Broadrick's guitar rings out in an endless loop as he recites negative mantras in a gloomy, reverbed-out monotone. "The Father" is another near ballad; Broadrick's singing voice is clean, almost angelic, but swathed in reverb and echo, and the guitars seem to shimmer like sunlight breaking through clouds. It's rare that a Godflesh song sounds like Jesu, but this comes close.

The album ends with two pummelling dirges in a row. "Mythology Of Self", a *Streetcleaner*-heavy trudge through ankle-deep sonic muck, is as slow and pounding as Swans circa 1984 with the lyrics emerging from deep in Broadrick's throat one rage-flecked word at a time. Finally, "You Are The Judge, The Jury, And The Executioner", the longest track on the record at almost eight minutes, has the beauty and dreamlike atmosphere of "Don't Bring Me Flowers" from *Pure*.

Phil Freeman

Heleen Van Haegenborgh
Squaring The Circle
El Negocito CD/DL

"How I want a drink, alcoholic of course, after the heavy lectures involving quantum mechanics." The line is a mnemonic to recall the value of the infinite number pi, devised a century ago by British physicist James Jeans. Pi continues to fascinate, offering a portal into mathematical mysteries. Heleen Van Haegenborgh is a pianist, improvisor and composer in Ghent, Belgium, and her new release *Squaring The Circle* for percussion quartet and electronics is a stirring musical journey into the heart of pi-manipulated chaos.

The work is also a response to a visual piece in Van Haegenborgh's home town: *Pi, Fugue Pour Les Survivants* by Johan De Wilde, an ongoing graphic grid of brightly coloured strips which De Wilde adds to each year. The image is reproduced in the CD booklet, and it has a handmade quality, somewhere between a tapestry and a scientific graph recording an experiment. However Van Haegenborgh's music stands proud and independent, unreliant on pictures or maths. It's simply a very strong performance and surely some form of collaboration between the composer and her young percussionists: Aya Suzuki, Anita Cappuccinelli, Lucas Messler and Diego Sáenz Mateo, together known as GAME.

Employing a houseful of instruments – from the roar of gongs and timpani to the tuned crotales and tubular bells, via the joy of a "spiral thrash" – the group generate a single 45 minute piece that ebbs and flows. There's plenty of variety without rhetoric or hysteria, and enough space to make listening simple and pleasurable. As Van Haegenborgh puts it, a sense of freedom, naturalness and directness is what she always struggles for.

Electronic sound is used modestly at first, but around halfway through the electronics kicks in and provides extra excitement. Everything is excellently recorded by Peter Desmedt in his Ghent studio. Ten years ago Van Haegenborgh was performing her *Signaux* for piano and 23 foghorns to a large audience outdoors in the Ghent docks. *Squaring The Circle* denotes a composer whose capacity for intrigue persists.

Clive Bell

IzangoMa
Ngo Ma
Brownswood DL/2xLP

Pretoria, South Africa's IzangoMa are billed as an experimental 15-member collective. John Cage said he did his experiments at home, and had things worked out for public performance – but here the description refers to the plethora of contemporary techniques and effects that IzangoMa deploy. Headed by Sibusile Xaba (vox/keyboards) and Ashley Kgabo (synths/snare/drum machine), their debut album appears on Gilles Peterson's Brownswood label.

Ngo Ma brings together township styles pantsula and bubblegum – new to me – in a broad synthesis with Sun Ra's intergalactic stylings. Spiritual chants and electro-analogue sonics in a big band idiom create a dense scoring that reminds me of a Bill Laswell gumbo. The collective began when Xaba and Kgabo met in 2016 and incorporates Mozambiquan and South African musicians. *Ngo Ma* blends traditional instrumentation with a panoply of electronics – drum machine, Roland TR-8, Moog Minitaur analogue bass and ARP Odyssey duophonic synthesizer.

Driven by duophonic synth, the eerie, trance-like "Birds (Of A Feather)" dances edgily around a single chord. It's purely instrumental, throwing in Ra-like space effects. "City Lights" is a lively dance, sustained by TR-8 handclaps. "Out Of The World" mixes historic and contemporary South African styles – Sibusile's MC calls are propelled by walking piano reminiscent of marabi, the blues of South Africa. "Tribute To Johnny Dyani", with its retrofuturist effects and chorale vocals, is dedicated to the great Blue Notes bassist.

On the long, discursive "Mgung U Ndlovu" the dominant instrumental voice is lyrical soprano saxophone, laced with delightfully kitsch effects. The album closes with hypnotic, kwaito influenced "Wathint' Imbokodo". *Ngo Ma* is a beautifully engaging concept that demonstrates the enduring popularity of jazz derived styles in South Africa.

Andy Hamilton

Rickie Lee Jones
Pieces Of Treasure
BMG Modern CD/DL/LP

Rickie Lee Jones has been, by her usual standards, rather productive over the past decade or so, and the thread of albums she's woven since 2007's *The Sermon On Exposition Boulevard* has her rejuvenated, and at peace, it seems, with her history. It increasingly reads like a mature third act, after a first phase where Jones stretched the arc of her song on masterpieces like 1983's *The Magazine*, and a curious period near the turn of the century where she experimented with genre and voice – triphop on 1997's *Ghostyhead*, a gentle, resonant covers set on 2000's *It's Like This*.

Pieces Of Treasure is Jones's jazz standards collection, an album so obvious to long term fans, the biggest surprise is that the mercurial and unpredictable Jones let it happen. She was encouraged by producer Russ Titelman, who she worked with on both her 1980 debut and its 1981 follow-up *Pirates*. They're a dream team. Titelman is a steady presence, guiding the performances as Jones locates the core of each song. The song selection demands reverence, but nothing pious, which suits Jones's serious playfulness, and when she takes liberties with melody, it's all the better to drape her voice over the musicianship, like lights across landscape.

There are thoughtful touches throughout – Ara Dinkjian's oud on "Nature Boy" reframes the song, unexpectedly; the acoustic guitar and voice duet of "On The Sunny Side Of The Street" where Jones sings tenderly and joyously, and throughout, a sense that Jones is captured and quietly enraptured by each song. The sobs at the end of "It's All In The Game" are about emotion, sure, but they're also, somehow, about Jones's mastery of space and pause, and her ability to transform ageless material.

Pieces Of Treasure is a moving album from an artist who knows these songs inside out and is smart enough to know when to set knowledge aside, to access each song's elemental power.

Jon Dale

Zubin Kanga
Machine Dreams
Nonclassical CD/DL

Australian born pianist, composer and music technologist Zubin Kanga explores the possibilities of cutting edge technology on new album *Machine Dreams*. The material, commissioned as part of funded research project Cyborg Solosts, in association with a UK Research and Innovation Future Leaders Fellowship at Royal Holloway University, incorporates motion and touch sensor tech, old school synthesis, AI and an assortment of digital hybrid instruments and sound shaping applications.

It's satisfying to note the diversity of the contemporary composing talent showcased here, some of whom also happen to be disabled, women, non-binary, trans, queer and composers of colour. The album opens with Alex Paxton's relentlessly playful "Car-Pig", a manic frenzy of layered sampler instruments, with micro-sliced animal noise, bagpipes, uncanny voices and tack piano flourishes careening like a demented merry-go-round on fast forward. Tansy Davies's ten minute solo for Prophet synth "Star-Way" (dedicated to the memory of Mira Calix) sets into motion arpeggio sequences that bounce, unfurl and refract with delicate thunder; squelchy tones harden to glinting shards, wrapping tendrils around prismatic harmonic colour. The long lines of "Single Form (Swell)" thicken, crackle and churn with noise and debris, becoming an expanse of oceanic sound. Post-human ideas come to the surface in Nwando Ebizie's "I Will

DJ Brittle, VHS Head and Wobbly revel in the delicate (and indelicate) sounds of plunder

By Emily Bick

Meow mixer: DJ Brittle

DJ Brittle
Aleatoric Sampling System Vol 1
Bliss Archive DL/MC
VHS Head
Phocus
Skam CD/DL/2xLP/MC
Wobbly
Additional Kids
Hausu Mountain CD/DL/MC

These three releases could loosely be categorised as plunderphonics, but they're more concerned with using samples to ask questions about time – how it's spent, how it flows, what could happen next.

Since 2009, Blackpool's Adrian Blacow aka VHS Head has been mining sonic material from old videotapes, mostly 1980s horror, undertaking a painstaking process of watching, isolating and splicing. On "Cold Open" a melodic synth line spirals at breakneck speed, before a chewy voice downpitched all the way to hell pronounces, *"Ashes to ashes/dust to dust"*. "Zagatile Marionette" sets another slurred demonic voice into Simon Says mode as it reels off instructions to walk slowly and take small steps, smell a flower: more in key with those vaporwave songs riffing on guided meditation tapes.

Affiliated with the scuzzy deconstructionists and noiseniks of the Avon Terror Corps collective, Bristol based Felix Drake aka DJ Brittle culls fragments from a cache of classical and free jazz recordings. Titles are numbered and appear to be dates, but time is amorphous here; elements do not build or resolve, but drift and revolve. "180820" features a sludgy sewer growl that could be haunting something in VHS Head's collection, and "180122" is heroically perverse with its ever cycling trumpet fanfares announcing nothing.

Jon Leidecker aka Wobbly's *Additional Kids* is less about mining samples from a decaying archive than using them strategically and sparingly while looking towards a series of chaotic futures. Lyrically, it's a rickety circus of overthinking and ambivalence, mostly about having or not having children (the title track is inspired by the lesbian philosopher Monique Wittig, who critiqued heterosexuality as a political system to be overthrown). Gnostic, rapid-fire musings about the nature of reality in "Entanglement" (with Scatter Pattern) about *"a test within a test within a test within a test"* are followed by a patched-in retort of *"That's right... your momma!"*. "Bank Account" – an increasingly hallucinatory complaint about being drained by bills and no clean underwear – skips around like the pink elephants sequence from *Dumbo*, sung by an increasingly harried Marisa Elene Nadieja.

On the flipside, "You Belong Here" sounds positively celestial, like the aerated synth bliss of Mouse On Mars. A floaty chorus of Blevin Blectum, Kevin Blechdom, Alexandra Buschman-Roman, Danishta Rivero and Pamela Z lovingly croons *"Where are you now?"* accompanied by plunderphonics pioneer John Oswald on saxophone. ○

Fix Myself (Just Circles)", where text to speech dialogue stutters and jumbles among anxious throbbing rhythms and sampled piano.

Two works explore the expressive affordances of the TouchKeys keyboard, Robin Haigh's pensive, thrumming "Morrow" and Ben Nobuto's cyborg-inspired "Bad Infinity". The biological horror comedy of Chaines's "Escape TERF Island" slops wet gurgles and pitched farts on top of crushed industrial beats. A lot happens on *Machine Dreams*, but the consistent thread is Kanga's fearless touch, which reliably manages to locate the emotive wellspring hidden within the machines.

Leah Kardos

Lucy Liyou
Dog Dreams
American Dreams DL/LP

During the first few seconds of Lucy Liyou's new album, eerie whispers and static fuzz interweave. It's a fittingly ominous setting for the track, which describes a dream in which Liyou is drowning and eventually pulled to shore, a meditation on dependence and trust. But by the end, the music becomes something unexpected, a pensive ballad made of sparing voice and piano.

This intimate, ever evolving style characterises Liyou's music. Since albums like *Welfare* and *Practice*, the San Francisco based artist's work has collaged sounds and grappled with personal topics like gender identity and family, finding inspiration in the Korean storytelling genre of p'ansori. But with *Dog Dreams*, their music feels its most personal, digging deep into their raw voice to ask questions about love and longing. The album, which was co-produced with New York based artist Nick Zanca, comprises three wandering, contemplative tracks that each reflect on dreams and memories.

Liyou's music draws on a range of influences – pop, jazz, classical, ambient – layering them all at once or placing them back to back. Take the abrupt transition of the album's opener from a haunted latticework of scrapes into a love song, or the robotic spoken word of "April In Paris", a reimagined Vernon Duke jazz standard, which gradually expands into a lush bed of pillowy sound.

But the most powerful moments are those in which Liyou sings on their own, stripping away the electronics and fuzz to leave an unadorned piano and aching vocals. During the album's closer "Fold The Horse", bird chirps and bristling crunches fade out to reveal Liyou's innermost voice. They sing *"Please don't let me go"* with a heartbreaking sense of yearning. In those five words, you can feel their anguish, an ache of desire that cuts right to the heart.

Vanessa Ague

Dave Lombardo
Rites Of Percussion
Ipecac CD/DL/LP
Venamoris
Drown In Emotion
Three One G DL/LP

It took 25 years of coaxing by Fantômas bandmate Mike Patton to get Dave Lombardo

Jennifer Lo

Mandy, Indiana

to cut a drums-only album, but the payoff is worth the effort. Those who've typecast Lombardo as strictly a metal/punk sticksman will be surprised by *Rites Of Percussion*. The drummer for Slayer, Testament, Mr Bungle and others isolated himself in the studio with an abundant supply of percussion instruments from around the world (plus a grand piano) and let his imagination run riot. The result resembles Tullio De Piscopo's *Suonando La Batteria Moderna* more than anything hyped by MetalSucks. Nix your devil horns for now.

The closest release in Lombardo's catalogue to *Rites Of Percussion* might be 2005's *Drums Of Death*, cut with illbient icon DJ Spooky. There, Lombardo flexed his underutilised funk chops in an experimental hiphop context without sacrificing power. That approach – among others – continues on *Rites*, as Lombardo drops thunderous beats ripe for sampling while also generating atmospheres rife with menace. "Separation From The Sacred" demonstrates Lombardo's wicked combo of strength and dexterity with an array of timbres and tempos flashing by in dynamic counterpoint. On "Journey Of The Host", the drums slap as if Clyde Stubblefield were using mammoth tusks on "Funky Drummer". "Maunder In Liminality" percolates and pounds in the vicinity of Jon Hassell's Fourth World. Somewhere within the robust grooves and ominous auras, a brilliant horror film soundtrack is twitching to escape.

Venamoris – who feature Lombardo and his singer/songwriter/pianist wife Paula – are a much more conventional proposition. Dave convinced Paula Lombardo (who once sang backing vocals for schmaltzy crooner Wayne Newton, but had gone on musical hiatus) to reignite her talents for *Drown In Emotion*. A MOR radio quality pervades the ballad heavy album's 12 songs; Paula's technically proficient voice is a bit vanilla, while Dave's drumming is aptly restrained, given the emotionally intimate adult pop setting.

Once you overcome the shock of hearing *Reign In Blood*'s timekeeper doling out polite rimshots, you can appreciate Paula's deft melodies achieving a level of yearning poignancy. The couple metalicise things on "Misguided" and "Oceans" as guitars chug lommi-like and Dave punches up the drums and cymbals. But Paula's poised vocals don't mesh with this more macho style. Easy (listening) does it.

Dave Segal

Mandy, Indiana
I've Seen A Way
Fire Talk CD/DL/LP

Manchester's Mandy, Indiana occupy a space between heaving basement rave and arthouse film. Their debut album sees them expanding the stagger of their debut EP into an angular universe of uneasy, grainy beats.

Disappointingly, the band elect to open their debut album with "Love Theme (4K VHS)", a cliched arpeggiated synth track, with only a distant rainstorm of grainy noise hinting at the palette of griminess to come. It's far from an album of let downs, however – this opener devolves into string-like screeches before the mechanical rave beat of "Drag [Crashed]" climaxes with what sounds like squealing wheels. Valentine Caulfield's matter of fact vocal turns into a barely contained scream-shout. "Pinking Shears" then swaggers on in half-time before exploding into heavy bass fuzz that resembles a collection of cheese graters in an industrial strength cement mixer.

This album is full of the unexpected, its surprises coming in abrupt right turns and harsh geometric lines. The band make use of offsite recordings; moments of cutlery-drawer rattle in "Mosaick" make this music feel as though it's being unearthed from a long buried trunk, or decoded from alien signals (albeit from a planet where they speak French).

The organ intro of "Injury Detail" and the airiness of "2 Stripe" offer moments of respite, but even these are heard through a dirty gauze of skulking underground filth. We collapse back into the fury of "Peach Fuzz" before the album's end. You might not always know what they are saying but the wails in "Iron Maiden" and foreboding synths of "(Crystal Aura Redux)" don't need translating. The bleak production and relentless beats should keep us dancing all the way through the apocalypse.

Rosie Esther Solomon

Donny McCaslin
I Want More
Edition CD/DL/LP

US saxophonist Donny McCaslin said that his last album *Blow* (2018) represented something of an artistic breakthrough, arriving at a unique fusion of jazz, pop, art rock and electronic experimentation with approaches inspired by his collaboration with David Bowie on 2016's *Blackstar*.

I Want More continues in this direction, with sharp focus and hot anger pushing the dial up on the feral intensity and chaotic chemistry for which McCaslin and his group (bassist Tim Lefebvre, drummer Mark Guiliana, synth wizard Jason Lindner) have become known. This energy is further monsterised with rude and fluorescent production from David Fridmann (The Flaming Lips, Mercury Rev, Haim). One can also sense the influence of Lee 'Scratch' Perry, with whom McCaslin and Lefebvre collaborated on New Age Doom's 2021 album *Lee 'Scratch' Perry's Guide To The Universe*.

"Stria" opens with effervescent, stuttering rhythmic figures that emerge, refract and escalate on all sides, building in puzzle pieces towards scorching solos on top of a satisfyingly blunt edged groove. Lindner's cosmic electronics drive the swollen dub stomp of "Fly My Space Ship" towards the outer reaches. "Hold Me Tight" is awash in hazy spatials, waves of euphoric melody riding on intense driving rhythms. The righteous "Body Blow" teams muscular breakbeats with a pugnacious hook and some wonderfully aggressive production. Solos are fierce and hectic – McCaslin ends up honking like an enraged Wookiee, and a magus level break from Lindner defies the rules of spacetime. "Big Screen" cools things off with neon atmospheric pop, additional string arrangements providing rich, cinematic loveliness.

Strings appear again in the elemental funk of "Landsdown", inserting structural moments of tenderness between gritty soloing and globular bass synth. "I Want More" closes the album with more familiar fusion à la *Head Hunters* and *Thrust*-era Herbie Hancock. Altogether, an elegantly hectic and life-affirming listening experience.

Leah Kardos

Metallica
72 Seasons
Blackened CD/DL/2xLP/MC

With a title that nods cryptically to the 18 years that launch a life and a scorched baby crib on its sleeve, the 11th Metallica album begs to be heard as a return to square one. Lead single "Lux Aeterna" scoots back to 1983, lifting lines from their debut *Kill 'Em All* and trying to make off with any leftover bits of adrenaline from that set. As *72 Seasons* rolls on (and on), though, it sounds less like the ragged thrash of old. Instead, it turns into one truly strange neon piss yellow album, a taste of cyborg metal from the future.

Writing about Metallica for *Melody Maker* back in 1988, Simon Reynolds remarked that the band was transforming thrash into a kind of algebra – refining their music into a "rigorous grid of incisions and contusions". A similar kind of drilled, mathematical precision runs through this set, but it's been dialled up by Greg Fidelman's airless, maximalist production. Virtuosity quickly shades into

Harry Steel

something inhuman, as every plectrum and drumstick lands inevitably – and thrillingly – on target. Take the opening of "Screaming Suicide". The riff crunches in, perfectly in step with Lars Ulrich's faultless drums, and a moment later the wah-pedal lead soars into action. Rather than channelling the raw sound of 1983, it feels closer to a MIDI score, or the robotic glide of a 16-bit game soundtrack – you can almost see the *Road Rash* bikes skidding into view.

The album wraps with "Inamorata", which resembles a gigantic passive-aggressive farewell to James Hetfield's ex-wife. At 11 minutes it's the longest song the band have ever released, signalling a desire to plant something real at the heart of their machine. Hetfield croons like an FM country radio star (*"Misery, she kills me/Ooh, but I end this war"*) and there's a brief turn to acoustic balladry at the halfway point – but the real punch comes at the very end. The notes fade, they lower their axes, and the tape keeps rolling for a few seconds of studio chit chat. Hearing these voices you remember, with a jolt, that this whole gleaming grid of riffs came from the hands of four human beings.

Rob Turner

Me:You
Field Tapes In Der Trash
American Dreams DL/LP/MC

Field Tapes In Der Trash is the ambitious debut album from Me:You, a project by Mourning [A] BLKstar's RA Washington and LaToya Kent. Given the sprawling, ambitious vision of the collective's discography, this record is a welcome change of pace, opting for minimalist arrangements that reveal the amount of depth and meaning that can be wrought from simple melodies and textures. That can be heard immediately on the opener "Burns", which takes a spare drum beat and accompanies it with persistent buzzes and a warbling guitar solo. *"I got a little magic in my pocket"*, sings Kent. Both here and on the rest of the album, she lets her unadorned vocals rub up against shoddy production, conjuring up something mystical in the everyday.

It's this confidence in the material that allows *Field Tapes* to shine – it has the feeling of wandering aimlessly in a drunken stupor and stumbling upon something fantastical. Sonically, it's linked with triphop's murk and sensuality, but also the lo-fi fantasias of Klein and Kathleen Daniel. That songs can vary in length but have equal impact attests to Me:You's understanding of restraint and release: tracks like "Git Ready" and "Sun Zsu" don't even break the two minute mark, but their looping production is hypnotic enough to ensnare you. "The Current History Of Blue" is five minutes of a similar, hypnagogic haze, but it allows one to revel in its lethargic beat and poetic recitations. More than any other song, its guitar melodies, reverberating vocal sample and moody bassline feel like they're in a seductive dance.

The best songs on *Field Tapes* feel kinetic, like something is constantly brewing. You can sense that in Kent's impassioned vocals across "Dirt", or the punk spirit that lights "Gimlet" on fire. But it's also in the introspective, tape-looped guitar reveries of "Antiquity". Washington and Kent know that music is active – alive – and their command of its elements shows both their mastery and reverence.

Joshua Minsoo Kim

Modern Cosmology
What Will You Grow Now?
Duophonic UHF Disk CD/DL/LP

The last decade or so has been decently busy for Laetitia Sadier as a recording artist, although scaled back from the tireless release schedule she maintained during most of the 1990s as a member of Stereolab. That band's 2019 reunion has, to date, only been represented through live performance, so you couldn't wholly blame fans for craving something with a splash of Stereolab flavour. Modern Cosmology, which pairs Sadier with Brazilian band Mombojó, go some way to sating that desire on debut album *What Will You Grow Now?*, their second release following an EP released in 2016.

Some way is the operative term, it should be said, with album opener "Making Something" as prime an example as anything. Stereolab acolytes will peg that bubbling bass tone in a trice, while the keys of Chiquinho Moreira are something more akin to jazz funk with tropicalia dusting. Mombojó's jazz inclinations are often pronounced, Marcelo Machado's guitars almost fusion-y on "Consent For Life"; "Le Train Ne Passera Pas" is both louche and studious, recalling the interplay of Tortoise.

Perhaps the most striking break from the norm – although it works in the context of the album – is the closing "A Time To Blossom", whose foundation is something like yacht rock. There's enough odd percussion and woozy synth parts to transport the end result elsewhere, mind, and Sadier's penchant for sage aphorisms is as ripe as ever: *"An acorn will be oak tree if not impeded by its territory"*.

On "Trauma Release Makes Free", whose elegantly quivering synths could have slotted onto Stereolab's *Dots & Loops*, there's a rebuke of what she deems *"victim status"* feminism (*"Young women would need to hear they're strong and resilient equals of men/Not to fear half of human kind/Language of trauma ordeal, sustained sense of insecurity and not emancipation/They are incapacitating"*). You wonder if this is a recent conclusion of Sadier's or a longer standing one she's not previously had the chance to express in song.

Noel Gardner

Music Perspective Vol 1
Various
Music Perspective CD

Indulging in the magic of the scarcity effect, Georgia's Justin Tripp and New York City Two Bridges' Simon Gabriel compile 19 tracks by 19 artists, available only on compact disc. Its slimline packaging is a nod to the early-Y2K era of the personal music mix made up of MP3s downloaded from P2P file sharing applications over hours, even days, via dial-up internet and burned to CD-R. *Music Perspective Vol 1*'s selection echoes the eclecticism this mode of digital digging once generated, where weeks were spent surfing the web for anything and everything that sounded interesting before the echo chamber of personalised searches and streaming services took hold.

The disc covers a spectrum of artists from across the global underground. Some of the more recognisable names include Austin Williamson, Zebrablood and Lolina – the latter's opening manifesto "What Is The Audience" acting as the compilation's unofficial mission statement, with a glitched voice recording contemplating the nature of experimental music. London's Malcolm Goldie backs her up with a similarly droll take on the futility of the

creative drive in the pitched and wavy avant techno of "Nobody's Interested And Nobody Cares". Warsaw's Lutto Lento presents an exhilarating take on the neo-Baroque sound of the day with the percussive "Salome".

Other equally tenacious polyrhythmic approaches include the Brazilian funk of São Paulo's DJ Gonzaga and DJ 2D Da Balança from Espírito Santo, while US cloud rapper Black Kray (aka SickboyRari) offers the off-tune drawl of wavy late Generation Y hiphop with "Codeine Tears In Her Fanta". Lesser known but equally intriguing artists hailing from Russia and Japan appear through the ebb and flow of dubbed out pop, tech noise and dance, as well as an unexpected wild card in the devotional ambient of California's Ihsaan Carter.

Music Perspective Vol 1 is a surprisingly cohesive listen for such a diverse variety of styles. The art of the Napster-era mixtape is applied to its disparate sounds, embodying the broken promise of a democratised internet bound together by difference.

Steph Kretowicz

MV & EE
Green Ark
Ramble DL/2xLP

Floating in on a balmy breeze of droning tamboura, electronic pulsation, wandering bass and a dreamily executed vocal, the musical partnership of MV (Matt Valentine) and EE (Erika Elder) return with their most hallucinogenic outing to date.

Titled "Free Range", the opening song is content to eddy along, gently gathering speed as it glides along its nearly 20 minute duration. The lushly organic feel of this opening number sets the pace for much of the rest of *Green Ark*'s content, where a myriad of instruments are brought into play by MV & EE, accompanied in their quest by bass player, drummer and percussionist Coot Moon. From the more electric guitar dominated "No Money" to the party groove jive that rumbles through "Livin' It Up", each song evolves into a deliriously joyful, yet subtly subdued cosmic funk jam.

Central to this theme is their laidback version of "Dancing In The Street", the Martha & The Vandellas hit that would later be covered by a diverse group of admirers such as David Bowie and Mick Jagger, Van Halen, The Grateful Dead and former Henry Cow guitarist Fred Frith. For their part in the song's evolution, MV & EE strip the title down to "Dancin'", together with the original rhythm that has now been reduced to the point where it is almost unrecognisable. It is only when Elder's heavily treated vocal eventually breaks through the swirling musical mist that it begins to take shape – before dissipating beneath a blanket of sonic fog. Tinged with the spirit of John Oswald's plunderphonic sound collages and turntablist Philip Jeck's experiments with found records, "Dancin'" is alive with musical memories that drift in and out of focus like the soundtrack to a lucid dream.

Green Ark's other delights are equally involving, where similar half-remembered themes from the past are revived, reshaped and astrally altered. On "Love From Outer Space" swooping synths and Frippertronic guitar movements merge into the groove, while "Rebirth" (made up of three sections) winds backwards and forwards before settling into a deeply resonating, bass haunted slumber pattern.

Edwin Pouncey

Old Saw
Sewn The Name
Lobby Art DL/LP

Old Saw is "a network of New England string pluckers, organ drivers and bell ringers" led by Vermont based composer, multi-instrumentalist and engineer Henry Birdsey on lap and pedal steel guitar. They craft music that is both communal and intimate, a soundtrack to mundane observations where a water tower contrasts with a mechanical bull rental agency, taxidermy shop and a local church.

Now a quintet, Old Saw's new album *Sewn The Name* moves from modern western to avant garde territories (comparable to the output of Birdsey and Zach Rowden's Tongue Depressor project). Pelt, who combine dusty folk tropes with improvisation and avant garde drones, come to mind. Often, Birdsey's steel guitar only adds colour to the vast sonic plains and slowly shifting instrumental layers, as with "Brooksville Trestle Remains" where the interplay between Ira Dorset's fiddle drones and Al Lakely's 12-string guitar raises a cloud through which the steel guitar shines. Birdsey's technique evolves into ambient meditations reminiscent of the soundscapes conjured by California pedal steel guitarist Chuck Johnson or Kingston, NY based Sam Wenc, who records under the alias Post Moves and co-runs Lobby Art Records, the label through which Old Saw release their music.

In Old Saw's hands, folk music becomes abstract, subject to the fertile imaginations of the players, and *Sewn The Name* is more driven by freewheeling experimentation than its predecessor. The harvest is even richer this time around.

Miloš Hroch

Massimo Pupillo/Malcolm McDowell/Gabriele Tinti
Songs Of Stone
Subsound DL/10"

Songs Of Stone consists of five readings of five poems set to music. The poems are read by the great UK actor Malcolm McDowell, who is perhaps best known for his performances as Mick Travis in late film maker Lindsay Anderson's *If..../O Lucky Man!/Britannia Hospital* trilogy. The bass player Massimo Pupillo (of jazz metal outfit Zu) composed the music and sound design while the poems were written by the poet Gabriele Tinti.

Tinti has worked with some prestigious organisations and museums. His work has been read by other very well known actors. His work is wholly rooted in the follicles of the past. Indeed, he has composed poems about or inspired by ancient works of art. But I suspect that this sense of the ancient is ahistoric. A reading of history that is unscientific, that hams up myth and the idea that the ancient past is mystical and unknowable.

There's also a thanatological dimension running throughout these poems that strikes me as silly. An emphasis on wounds, flesh, pain, death. Goth nonsense. McDowell does a good job, he dials it in well and has a great voice, but he deserves better. As does the listener.

The music and sound design are not bad yet reinforce the problems already identified. Delay and reverb are used to convey space. Synths twinkle here and there in the stereo spectrum in order to imply the parameters of this space. Drones create a horizontal aspect and the bedrock on which McDowell's voice sits. Synth string swells are draped around the words adding a further air of portentousness.

Given that the poems are somehow located in a fictional mystical past it is a paradox that this music would not be out of place in a generic science fiction film or video game. *Songs Of Stone* is a flawed enterprise, all gloss and no grit.

Richard Thomas

Taiko Saito
Tears Of A Cloud
Trouble In The East CD/DL/LP

On *Tears Of A Cloud*, Japanese musician Taiko Saito plays a variety of marimbas and vibraphones, creating lyrical, spacious and spiritual music. She plays solo, exploiting the contrast between these percussion instruments very effectively and sympathetically.

The marimba consists of wooden or fibreglass bars suspended over resonators. The concert instrument was developed in the early 20th century, combining elements of the European xylophone and Central American marimba – only the latter had resonators. There were acoustic difficulties in the lowest range, which created a discordant sound. These problems were solved when manufacturers discovered how to tune the instrument's harmonics to the octave, giving a warmer, more resonant bass sound.

As its name suggests, the outstanding feature of the vibraphone is its vibrato. In 1916 Hermann Winterhoff of the Leedy Drum Company applied a mechanical vibrato to a steel marimba. This became the vibraphone, where vibrato was obtained by repeated opening and closing of the upper ends of the resonators by means of revolving vanes.

These distinctive effects are fully realised on this superb release. Born in Sapporo in 1976, Saito studied with marimba virtuoso Keiko Abe. In 1997 she moved to Berlin to study vibraphone and composition with David Friedman. She has worked with contemporary composer Sofia Gubaidulina and in 2021 she recorded with pianist Satoko Fujii.

Most pieces on her new album are freely improvised. "Daichi", on bass marimba, is a dance in elastic rhythms, while "Rain" mimics the irregular rhythms of nature, becoming more complex and clangourous. "Underground" is an eerie, haunting sound exploration, in which Saito uses a double-bass bow and two oversized soft sticks. Some pieces are based on a motif, notably "Sound Gradation", which echoes Reich/Glass minimalism in its ingenious rhythmic motifs and subtly shifting accents. Here, changes of mallet help create contrasting timbres. In spite of its title "Angry Bird – Live" evokes a very

The radical music of Guatemalan electroacoustic composer Joaquín Orellana receives overdue recognition

By Francis Gooding

Joaquín Orellana
Sacratávica
Identidata DL/2xLP

The wooden marimba has been played in Guatemala for almost half a millennium. Arriving in the 1500s with enslaved Africans trafficked to the Mesoamerican colonies of New Spain, it was firmly established as a preferred instrument among indigenous Maya communities by the 1600s, and eventually also found favour with Spanish descended Ladinos. When Guatemala achieved independence from Spain and Mexico in 1821 it was recognised as the national instrument; it is still one of the country's official emblems, along with the flag and the national anthem, appearing on the highest value 200 quetzal banknote. What better symbol could a radical musician choose to deconstruct?

This was the aim of the celebrated Guatemalan avant garde composer Joaquín Orellana when he began to develop dozens of new instruments in the mid-1970s. Calling them útiles sonoros (sound tools), he based most of them on the structure or sonorities of the marimba, pulling the instrument apart and separating its elements before rebuilding it in fantastic forms. A rare chance to hear his work recorded, *Sacratávica*, released by Guatemalan imprint Identidata, comprises four of his rarely heard compositions for the útiles, dating from the 1980s, 90s and 2000s.

Born in 1930, Orellana initially studied violin at Guatemala's National Conservatory, where he was energised by the work of Schoenberg. By the end of the 50s he was beginning to achieve recognition as an adventurous composer, and by the early 60s he was experimenting with tape compositions. In 1967, he was granted a fellowship to study in Buenos Aires at the Centro Latinoamericano de Altos Estudios Musicales (CLAEM, also attended by Colombia's Jacqueline Nova, profiled in *The Wire* 468, among many others). Here he encountered forward thinking composers from all over Latin America and, with the opportunity to study new experimental works from Europe and elsewhere, he began to compose electroacoustic music.

Returning to Guatemala, Orellana was struck by the need to respond to a dire situation: in the early 70s, the country was embroiled in the second decade of a brutal civil war which pitted a US backed military dictatorship against a leftist and indigenous insurgency. At first Orellana continued to compose electroacoustic works, but the need for an adequate response to events led him toward the creation of a new music that would speak directly to the Guatemalan context.

From this desire came the útiles sonoros, which Orellana first created in a basement workshop beneath the Teatro Nacional in Guatemala City. To him, the Guatemalan marimba is a haunted, sacred instrument, embodying the voices of the victims of colonialism, slavery and genocidal civil war. Once shattered and reconfigured, he felt it could reconnect with the past and renew the present. The útiles typically take some element of the marimba and redeploy it in a novel form. The imbaluna is a marimba stretched into a sharpened crescent moon. It's played by sliding a small mallet up and down its length to produce woody glissandi. The sinusoide is a looped rollercoaster of continuous marimba keys, activated with the sweep of the player's arm. The cirlum and circumar are drum shaped cages of suspended wooden keys or bamboo tubes. Elsewhere, Orellana departs from the marimba model. The pinzafer and herroím are large, flattened pieces of iron, shaped like isolated elements of an Alexander Calder mobile, which produce squalling resonance when bowed or scraped; the tubarc is a bowed metal tube, whose overtone-rich notes Orellana has described as "an insult to the violin". Everywhere the emphasis is on complex sheets of sound, rather than isolated or tempered notes, and from this palette Orellana composed an alternative, imagined Guatemalan music that moved away from colonial European musical norms.

Recorded in 2016 by an orchestra of over 90 people (60 of them vocalists), the works on *Sacratávica* seethe and glitter, as the sound fields created by the útiles provide a meticulously orchestrated economy of tension and release. Across the four works they produce rattling glissandi, howling and whistling vibrations, tinks, clonks and sussurations. Orellana's performed works often also include poetry, choral singing and Schwitters-like wordless improvisation in imaginary languages, heard here on 1982's *Híbrido A Presión* (*Hybrid Under Pressure*). The huge choir is used to devastating effect on *Sacratávica (Las Voces De Río Negro)*, which unfolds as a longform narrative descent into the violence of the civil war, when the inhabitants of whole villages were massacred by the army, their bodies dumped into the Río Negro.

The shorter *Fantoidea* is somewhat lighter in tone, being a response to Paul Dukas's score for Disney's *Fantasia*, played exclusively on the útiles and originally accompanied by an animation. But *Ramajes De Una Marimba Imaginaria* (*Branches Of An Imaginary Marimba*) that most directly sums up Orellana's revision of his country's emblematic instrument: a rattling, pensive portrait in sound, poetically evoking landscape and people, city and forest, in which the simulated sounds of insects, frogs and birds coagulate into sedate waltzes that conjure, with ambiguous irony, the national music that Orellana has spent a lifetime reimagining. ○

Father of invention: Joaquín Orellana

Courtesy Chapin Films

disoriented and furious insect. A beautiful and compelling recording.
Andy Hamilton

Marta Salogni & Tom Relleen
Music For Open Spaces
Hands In The Dark DL/LP
Although not the first posthumous album to feature Tom Relleen – Tomaga, his duo with percussionist Valentina Magaletti released both *Intimate Immensity* and a live collaboration with Pierre Bastien in 2021 – *Music For Open Spaces* further expands the map of sonic explorations embarked upon but tragically curtailed by Relleen's death from cancer in August 2020.

A collaboration with Relleen's partner, audio producer/engineer Marta Salogni, the album itself offers a travelogue, through pieces improvised at California's Joshua Tree National Park and the Cornwall coast. Other tracks were recorded later at the pair's London home; it's likely that events both global and personal forced this shift. Yet wherever and whenever the circumstances of creation – is that the ocean or traffic roaring faintly in the background of "Clocks"? – the music moves enticingly between physical and interior worlds, setting scenes for the imagination to populate.

With a sparse yet flexible palette of tape machines, synthesizers and electric bass, the mid-1970s work of Cluster and particularly that German duo's recordings with Brian Eno are never far away. Vaporous synth loops, garbled speech snippets and terse bass gradually cohere within "Desert Glass", evoking similar still yet ever-changing places, while Relleen's low-frequency summoning of portals opening and caverns filling with dread on "Snarls" and "Giant Desert Cats" echoes Moebius and Roedelius's chill flipsides to pastoral bliss. A pair of glowering vignettes, "Fauna" and "FFXX" close the album – at barely two minutes between them, they share a photographer's approach to encapsulating time in one decisive shutter press.

Elsewhere, the mood is more joyful: "pING poNGS" casually bubbles and hisses like a Boards Of Canada outtake; on "Furthest Fire" bass and synth are poised, watchful, egging each other on to pounce. Even "March", whose title can't help but suggest the lockdown imposed in Relleen's final spring, turns stasis into optimism, its tapestry of gently pulsing chimes suspended, expectant, cautiously hopeful.
Abi Bliss

Brandon Seabrook
Brutalovechamp
Pyroclastic CD/DL
Right where you're expecting six-string klang, *Brutalovechamp* opens with the sound of a recorder and a tone row instead of the anticipated power chord. Brandon Seabrook's not the kind of guitarist who ought to be second guessed – never a wise move with any artist – but this does seem like a swervy change of direction.

Perhaps, like everyone else, Seabrook is coming out of a period of enforced self-analysis and regrouping. His Epic Proportions octet features clarinet, recorder and cello, as well as guitar, percussion and vocals. The group seem like an evolution out of 2017's *Die Trommel Fatale*, which did a job on the drum in the jazz combo that was as much Günter Grass as it was Günter Sommer. This line-up is much more about counterpoint and polyphony. "I Wanna Be Chlorophylled" will be the comfortable benchmark piece for anyone who's followed Seabrook and doesn't necessarily want a new direction. It's punky but subtle, with layers of instrumental movement underneath the CBGB vibe. Then there's "The Perils Of Self-Betterment", a curiously folksy but restless line which may remind you of one of those self help or medical pamphlets that, instead of reassuring, leaves you feeling very anxious indeed.

It takes until the full-on "Gutbucket Asylum", with a mad vocal turn from Chuck Bettis, to see the family resemblance to Seabrook's earlier work. But in fact the most interesting stuff here is the atypical: "Libidinal Bouquets" is done on bowed banjo and could easily be passed off as a conservatory piece; "From Lucid To Ludicrous" runs precisely that gamut with breezy self-confidence.

A typical Brandon Seabrook album? Who knows? Maybe from now on, it will be, though the suspicion is that the next one will be different in exactly the same measure as this is from its predecessors. He's working out his changes in public, which is as exciting as it is dangerous.
Brian Morton

Wadada Leo Smith & Orange Wave Electric
Fire Illuminations
Kabell DL
The debut album from Wadada Leo Smith's new Orange Wave Electric ensemble is so redolent of Miles Davis circa 1969–75 it's uncanny. Smith plays like Miles – piercing, minimal, melodic – and with this band it's all there, the funkiness, the heaviness, the Hendrix skronk of the guitar, the trippiness.

Guitarists Nels Cline and Brandon Ross give us liquid textures à la Jimi Hendrix's "1983... (A Merman I Should Turn to Be)" as well as John McLaughlin-style noise. Bassists Bill Laswell and Melvin Gibbs should need no introduction, and knob twiddler Hardedge fills these massive welters of funk with all the right wibbles and wobbles. So far, so correct – and yet, as this album unfolds, it steadily burns away both references and resistance. The pleasure these grooves and sounds conjure obliterates any prevarication. This is a swamp to get stuck into, boots first.

"Ntozake Shange" is the opener and centrepiece, 15 minutes of suggestive oceanic funk, percussionist Mauro Refosco and drummer Pheeroan akLaff laying down a truly colossal groove, the band undulating and skittering around it in addictive whorls of racket before all slips into a "Yesternow" peal of ambient dread. "Muhammad Ali's Spiritual Horizon" is more *Bitches Brew* than *Live-Evil*, a rumbling, dissonant, arrhythmic smear of rippling drums and drones and plangent, strung-out horns which glide into the bass heavy tectonics of "Fire Illuminations In Side The Particles Of Light" beautifully. "Tony Williams" – the counterpart to "Ntozake Shange" – may well be the highlight here. Smith's searing solo horn and Hardedge's pulsating keys usher in an subaquatic series of unsettling surges and spills.

If someone told you *Fire Illuminations* was a recently uncovered annex to *The Cellar Door Sessions 1970* you wouldn't bat an eyelid. But that shouldn't distract or detract from this richly rewarding album.
Neil Kulkarni

Specimens
Power, Pain, Privilege
First Terrace DL/LP
A robotic voice reads out the now infamous 1930 Fletcher Report on mixed race children in Liverpool. This introductory track is less than five minutes but it feels like an age; it's a gruelling listen, we are told of their corruption of spirit and body before the voice repeats *"half caste"* over and over – a purgatorial cry of enforced identification and discrimination.

So begins *Power, Pain, Privilege* by Specimens aka British-Jamaican artist Alex Ives, commissioned by the Southbank Centre and written to accompany a film by longtime collaborator Lucie Rox, who is French-Congolese. It's an album of mourning, frustration and resilience which explores the experience of biracial identity.

The album proper begins with "Nascent Budding", a track of simmering ambience which retains the potential to blossom into something more. For now though, we must remain content with an understated dancehall rhythm droning in the background and a ghostly vocal. Elsewhere the music remains fractured – see the echoes in "Imposter Syndrome" or the creaky percussion and warped vocals of "Au Naturale". It's a record of broken metres, sliced and dissected.

"Bend, Break, Twist & Fold" brings a multitude of sonic ideas into one space – the offbeats of dancehall, high pitched feedback whines and mechanical creaking – all swelling together to create a soft cacophony which bleeds into "Cut Short, Bent Straight" whose title could be an allusion to the manipulation of Afro hair, or the eradication of identity itself.

"Kind Of Grey" sits in the middle ground between ambience and noise, static swelling in the background of an otherwise still ocean of smooth drones. Ives ensures we have something hopeful to hold on to through each track, be it the distant brass on the first track, or the playful movement of "Au Naturale". Those welcome moments of joy are somewhat cloudy and uncertain, as if still coloured by the aftershocks of the Fletcher Report. But that tentative joy should be marvelled at, grasped with both hands.
Rosie Esther Solomon

Temps
Party Gator Purgatory
Bella Union CD/DL/2xLP
Perhaps the biggest barrier to enjoying Temps is overcoming innate cynicism. Stand-up comedian James Acaster inhabits an alien

Former and current Dream Syndicate guitarists Paul B Cutler and Jason Victor present distinctive lessons in axework

By Byron Coley

Cranium command: Skull Practitioners

Skull Practitioners
Negative Stars
In The Red CD/DL/2xLP
Paul B Cutler
Les Fleurs
In The Red CD/DL/2xLP

Paul B Cutler played guitar in The Dream Syndicate (the premier guitar band of early 1980s Los Angeles) from the time Karl Precoda quit until the band retired in 1989. When they un-retired in 2012, Jason Victor (Syndicate co-founder Steve Wynn's bandmate in The Miracle Three) became the guitarist.

As it happens, both of these guys have new LPs out. Cutler's is a solo album, his first release since a 1994 collaboration with Black Flag's Chuck Dukowski. Victor's is the full-length debut by his New York based trio Skull Practitioners. The albums don't sound much like each other, but both have extremely high and excellent electric guitar profiles. Which makes a lotta goddamn sense, right?

Skull Practitioners are a psych-inclined power trio. Their vocal style tends to manifest a rough, teetering post-punk feel, but the music is readymade classicism of a stoned and heavy variety. *Negative Stars* isn't all thud and thunder, but the quiet parts are presented in a context where things are likely to explode; they're not so much lulling as anticipation-stokers. They way they churn up the sonic water has a mid-70s resonance sometimes akin to hard rock punk precursors like Dust, at others to prog/psych guitar bands like Man. Which sounds mighty fine to me.

Even better is Cutler's double 12" with its dandy pop-up centrefold. With earlier bands like Consumers and 45 Grave, Cutler used the same slashing guitar style he shows off here. The material on *Les Fleurs* is a somewhat strange form of punk pop. The guitar lines are razor sharp, while the vocals display a weird art pop logic. Originally, Cutler put these tunes up on YouTube with just guitar and voice, then Brad Laner came along. Laner was an experimental wunderkind in 80s Los Angeles with bands like Pilgrim State and Debt Of Nature, before he gained fame with Medicine and Electric Company. His addition of keys, percussion and sophistication add a lot to making Cutler's album sound so good. I'm sure I would've dug the more stripped down version, but Laner kicks things up a notch. Which means the musical references Cutler spreads across the two vinyl EPs that make up *Les Fleurs* (The Stooges, Black Sabbath, The Avengers, The Beach Boys, Chrome, etc) hold together as an album rather than just a music freak's scrapbook. Definitely worthwhile for those who like the sound of loud strings thrumming. ○

world of panel shows and worse, working alongside James Corden in Amazon's 2021 film of *Cinderella*. Temps rose from the ashes of an aborted mockumentary following Acaster's attempts to rekindle youthful aspirations to a career in music as a drummer.

Abandoned in the wake of the pandemic, he repurposed his drum tracks into the spine of an intercontinental mash-up with the aid of 40 musicians he'd previously interviewed in the course of writing a book, 2019's *Perfect Sound Whatever*. The *Party Gator* of the title was a lifesized costume won by Acaster as a child. Versions appear on the album sleeve and accompanying visuals, in garish green and yellow with a pink top hat and trousers. But if the concept is hideously whimsical the execution is sober, meticulous, restless and mostly exciting. Acaster's disregard for commercial conventions and expectations proves a huge strength. Rather than write songs he constructs collages. Elements repeat, dropping in and out of the mix, but rarely form the same configuration twice.

It's exhilarating and exhausting like working an overcrowded room, one moment faced by Detroit rapper Quelle Chris's steady stream of dry quips, the next a twee young female singing high, *"Help me get a grip"*. Voices swell and distort with intoxicated glee and confusion. A passing moment of calm with Baltimore's Ami Yang on sitar gives way to a whirlwind of energy from Sydney art pop singer Montaigne. A riff that appears first sung by Senegalese vocalist Gaston Bandimic morphs in a second into buzzy punk guitar. Bores are in the minority and easily avoided, the exquisitely curated majority impress both in isolation and together as kaleidoscopic wonder. An unlikely joy.
Richard Stacey

Henry Threadgill Ensemble
The Other One
Pi CD/DL

Over a few nights in May 2022, Henry Threadgill presented two performances at Roulette in Brooklyn, New York. Titled *One* and *The Other One*, each presented a selection of live and prerecorded speech, still images, videos and music. While the order and content of the visual elements varied, each night his band played the three-movement composition *Of Valence*, which appears on this album.

Of Valence was inspired by the late Milford Graves's incorporation of heart rhythms into music. Scrupulously ordered, it sounds nothing like Graves's omnidirectional playing, nor like heartbeats for that matter. But the word valence holds different and very particular meanings in the fields of chemistry and psychology, and Threadgill is no stranger to the practice of investing his music with power drawn from non-musical material. The notion of valence as an expression of an element's capacity to combine or bond with atoms comes to mind as turbulent strings and blues-steeped saxophone converge in "Movement II". One can imagine the composer charting the emotional dimensions as precisely as he does the intervallic leaps during "Movement III".

The music holds up quite well when isolated from the other component media. It is, like most of Threadgill's recent records,

John Bottomley

played by a large, unconventionally configured ensemble – four strings, three saxophones, two bassoons, piano, tuba and drums. Threadgill conducts, but does not play. He doesn't need to in order for the music to sound like his. Someone among the saxophonists does a good job of replicating his pungent alto tone. The doubled bassoons execute a signature Threadgill gambit of magnifying an unusual instrumental voice. And the way pizzicato strings and snare drum weave airy structures around Jose Davila's tuba translates the peculiar rhythmic language of Threadgill's small group Zooid to a larger ensemble.
Bill Meyer

Alan Wilkinson/Alex Ward/Jem Doulton
Wilkinson Ward Doulton
Shrike CD/DL
The drummer may be named after a famous pottery, but these guys are more than happy to serve as bulls in the china shop of contemporary improv, which was in danger of getting all delicate and laptoppy for a time there. Like Tony Bevan, who's been too little heard from of late, Alan Wilkinson plays in the heavyweight division, with the extraordinary ability to make his alto saxophone sound weighty and his baritone to have all the mobility and lightness of touch you'd once have expected of a Mulligan, Chaloff or Gordon.

Much of this music, turbulent as it is, convincingly scrolls back to those 1950s West Coast groups for whom the piano seemed like an indoor encumbrance and which took their energy direct from the horns. Just don't go into it expecting Art Pepper, Jim Hall and Shelly Manne, though once you get that thought into your head, it's hard to unthink it, especially on "Diffusivity", the most extended and aeriest of the four densely packed improvisations that make up the set.

Ward's role, far from being the group's accompanist or normative element, seems to be to break up any descent towards a settled groove, even if his is the instrument most likely to propose one. His move from clarinet to electric guitar might have seemed like a passing of the mantle following the death of mentor Derek Bailey, but increasingly emerges as an entirely logical extension of his own, sometimes gnomic musical world. Doulton, who may be less well known than the others, is a dream of a percussionist, one who's taken on board the lesson of Shelly Manne (or maybe more convincingly, Han Bennink) and plays the drums with simultaneous power and lightness. The two aren't and shouldn't be incompatible.
Brian Morton

Jozef Van Wissem & Jim Jarmusch
American Landscapes
Incunabulum CD/DL/LP
Sqürl
Silver Haze
Sacred Bones CD/DL/LP
Two longterm collaborative projects from musician and film director Jim Jarmusch spawn queasy, doom-laden new albums that grapple with the weight of modern American life. The suggestively titled *American Landscapes* is the latest from his duo with guitarist and lute player Jozef Van Wissem. Consisting of three long pieces, the music is true to their fascination with circular phrasing. On previous releases, Van Wissem's lute was the musical protagonist, but here it is sidelined by drones played on fuzzbox guitars. When it does appear, it feels significant. At the end of "Cleveland", it rings out clear and crisp on top of the distortion, like a wise narrator warning against the horrors that surround it; in "Akron" it is subsumed.

Sqürl is Jarmusch's heavy guitar/drums duo with film producer Carter Logan. Despite working together since 2009, *Silver Haze* is their debut album proper, after a string of EPs and soundtracks. Named after a strain of weed, it has an appropriately sludgy texture. The fuzzy guitars from *American Landscapes* carry over, but the pace is lethargic and disorientating. The mood of songs like "Queen Elizabeth" and "Berlin '87" sit somewhere on the edge of dread and resignation. Jarmusch's duet with Anika, "She Don't Wanna Talk About It", is an almost comically apocalyptic love song (*"We looked at the cloud formation/ Then she said 'Don't talk about it please'"*) that sounds like Lee Hazelwood duetting with Nico. Charlotte Gainsbourg adds cut glass narration to "John Ashbery Takes A Walk", and guitarist Marc Ribot joins for two songs, including the atypical "Garden Of Glass", a serene oasis in the midst of all this toxic waste.

An obvious touchstone for "The End Of The World" is Godspeed You! Black Emperor's "The Dead Flag Blues". Jarmusch presides over the persistent pound of drums and guitar, narrating a familiar apocalyptic scene of teenagers writhing in the remains of capitalist excess (*"They're off to scavage the mall... they like to scour the bins and fallen shelves for remaining clothes and sneakers"*). Obviously this is well-trodden ground, but even on the brink of corniness, the crunchy satisfaction of Sqürl's sound makes them extremely listenable.
Claire Biddles

billy woods & Kenny Segal
Maps
Backwoodz Studioz CD/DL/LP/2xLP
Kenny Segal and billy woods's remarkable *Hiding Places* was the greatest rap record of 2019 and anyone who heard it will have been waiting for the New York rapper and Los Angeles producer to hook up again. Where *Hiding Places* kept guest spots to a minimum *Maps* sees Danny Brown, Elucid, Shabaka Hutchings, Quelle Chris, Aesop Rock and Sam Herring from Future Islands joining in on the ruckus, which might raise concerns about dilution and patchiness.

Fear not. It's a more accessible record than *Hiding Places* – that cramped sense of dreamlike monotony is gone – but it's no less compelling. There are 17 tracks here, all different, and they're kept short – the themes that emerge concern travel, trajectories and a willful avoidance of repetition or cliche. There's a wonderful no fucks given feel to the sequencing which makes *Maps* a genuinely unpredictable journey.

Highlights include the slo-mo jetlag of "Soft Landing", Quelle Chris being typically engaging on the funktastic, spiky "Soundcheck", the unsettling spaces and dubbiness of "Rapper Weed" (like Miles Davis's "Sivad" rerubbed by Eno). At no point can you guess what the hell the next track is going to do, but because woods and Segal retain a steely sense of control over proceedings, even as the collaborators swim in and out, it feels like you're slowly getting immersed into their sonic picture painting, even if there seems an almost wilful perversity in the way the record refuses to cohere and comfort. By the time you're through to the startling "Year Zero" and "Hangman", you realise that your sense of destabilised discombobulation is the entire point, and that each track presents an aural facet that your mind can reassemble and stick together as it sees fit .

Played front to back it works as a dazzling kaleidoscope; on shuffle, every combination worked in a different way, with no weak links because the quality of each track is insanely high. Underground, resistant US rap par excellence.
Neil Kulkarni

MC Yallah
Yallah Beibe
Hakuna Kulala DL/LP
Holy hellfire, the speed of Yallah is astonishing. This is some of the most insanely maintained, incisively controlled spitting you'll hear all year. Yallah was born in Kenya, raised in Uganda, has been rapping since 1999, and her crush of experimental/conscious flow and hugely accessible beats is only now creeping into mainstream Ugandan rap.

This album is the follow-up to Yallah and Debmaster's acclaimed 2019 debut *Kubali*. On this record – created after Covid kiboshed tour plans in 2020 – she hooks up with the Berlin based producer again, but also welcomes Japanese producer Scotch Rolex (aka DJ Scotch Egg aka Shigeru Ishihara) and Congolese club maestro Chrisman into the production fold. The result is an astonishing suite of futuristic beats that touch on trap, dancehall, techno and even industrial, drawn together by Yallah's compelling, untouchable flow. A pan-African international patchwork sure, but one that feels cohesive and holistic thanks to Yallah's stunning vocal presence.

The opening trio of "Sikwebela", "Miniboss" and "Tuli Mukintu" damn near leave you breathless – Yallah has such an astonishing elasticity in her rhyming that at times you can't tell whether her voice has been processed into the beats themselves, so precisely matched is kick and snare and syllable. The doominess and darkness of the beats lend Yallah's rhymes a growing sense of fury and urgency – on the imperious Afro drill of "Sunday" you're reminded of The Bug at his heaviest, before the record smartly sidesteps into the startling, almost pop hyperventilation of "Big Bung".

That endless variety never detracts from the finesse and fury of the flows. "Baliwa" for instance is astonishing – part Scotch Rolex in full goth-guignol mode, part hypnotic spiral of multitracked cyber-rap. I hope anthems like the mighty "Hera" percolate through to the West with full force because *Yallah Beibe* is – until I hear different – not just African rap

Two new albums showcase the compelling strangeness of Brussels/Rotterdam label Futura Resistenza

By Leah Kardos

Index case: Goodiepal

Goodiepal & Bananskolen
The Pruttipal Index
Futura Resistenza 2xCD/DL
Gunnar Gunnsteinsson
A Janitor's Manifesto
Futura Resistenza DL/LP

Here is a pair of deeply strange and strangely brilliant new releases from Brussels/Rotterdam based label Futura Resistenza. *The Pruttipal Index* is a double CD compilation from the mysterious artist-activist known as Goodiepal, and the collective that includes Goodiepal & Pals/GP&PLS and BananSkole (Banana School).

The collective has been described online as a refugee and human smuggling organisation in disguise, operating on the borders of the Eurozone, and a clear anti-racist, pro-refugee theme runs throughout both discs. Loose group improvisations and performances of folk and dance musics are mashed up and enmeshed with almost every flavour of sound you could imagine – from heavy metal, retro electronica, community choirs, music theatre, no wave, Scandi dance pop, jazz and techno to skits, field and found sounds, professional, amateur and experimental recordings, and more besides.

Once you get used to the surreal flavour of the presentation, there is surprising poetry, playfulness and emotional intensity to be found. The most charming tracks sound like whole community collaborations – massed voices and ad hoc instruments, children and babies often given the mic to joyfully improvise. These include "Ginnungagab" – interpolating the melody of "Go West" while Goodiepal narrates the recent exploits of the collective – and the bug-eyed altogetherness of "The Ghost From The Teenage Roast". Scattered throughout are ruminations delivered by Goodiepal (in their Pruttipal persona) on isolation and the meaning of art, expression, and connection: *"Music for people who feel alone in this world"*.

Prog metal and punk moments bust out in unexpected places. Some tracks lingering towards the end of the second disc don't even have names. One titled "?" is a mere blip while a later track of the same title is a pretty gem of a song, with hushed vocals, acoustic guitars and chimes. A mad mixtape or pirate radio broadcast that captures something honest and revealing about the shared experiences of a community of displaced people, full of surprises and brimful of humanity.

For his second studio album, Reykjavik based artist and composer Gunnar Gunnsteinsson has revisited a period in his life when he worked part-time as a janitor in a communal art complex in Amsterdam between 2017–21. Led by spoken and sung narration blending fact and fiction, and making use of studio and field recordings made during the timeframe in question, *A Janitor's Manifesto* explores themes of loneliness, neurotic anxiety, observational comedy and the unexpected musicality of spaces and places both beautiful and banal. With confident songcraft, impressive poetry and meticulously neat production, Gunnsteinsson fashions a musical fabric that is satisfyingly rich in detail. There's something of the elegance of *Big Sun*-era Chassol here, only with more self-deprecating humour and sonic daring.

"I Believe In A Better World" is buoyant, bubbling over with brass and woodwind rhythms set against traffic noises, tubular bells, a strutting beat and ominous male choir. Gunnsteinsson's monologue is delivered poetry slam style: *"Soon friends, soon we can finally wiggle our pelvic cavities and somewhat hairy genitalia in the moonlight together"*. Highlights include the fizzing lead solo over the lumbering swing of "Janitor" and the breezy yacht rock vibes of "Á Speed Dial". The album climaxes with sax and synth driven "Niðursoðið Landslag" dancing around charming harmonic turns with the sounds of clanging dishes and banging doors, building into a focused, almost triumphant kosmische groove. Creative, punchy production ensures that even in its most eccentric moments, *A Janitor's Manifesto* is at all times a feast for the ears. ○

record of the year, but one of the global hiphop highlights of 2023 thus far.
Neil Kulkarni

Yetsuby
My Star My Planet My Earth
Bandcamp DL

With her latest EP, Seoul based DJ and producer Yetsuby inaugurates the record label of streetwear brand cum party crew The Internatiiional. While perhaps best known outside of Seoul as a member of the ambient duo Salamanda, she exercises her more kinetic sensibilities on the dancefloor, spinning drum 'n' bass regularly for The Internatiiional and other high octane crews in the city. This need for speed is evident on *My Star My Planet My Earth* where acrylic breakbeats and neon synths are as meticulously crafted as her ambient soundscapes.

An easy comparison would be Two Shell, in both their cutesy worldbuilding and splashy sound design. The elastic percs of "Digital Heart" recall the UK duo's 2022 anthem "Home", with glitchy splatter orbiting a 4/4 kick hurtling at around 170 bpm. The bassline wins out over the kick halfway through, absorbing it within its syncopated cadence before the track dissolves into the ether.

Yetsuby's voice – which often appears in her work with Salamanda – lends a diaphanous humanity to these tracks. The vocals in "dontgohome(ii0ii3)" soar above a hypnotic kick pattern – it almost feels ritualistic, a meeting of cosmos and earth mediated by technology. Sometimes, though, technology threatens to drown out the human. In "Chromatic Dormammu", her voice fights to be heard over whiplash-inducing breakbeats and a chromatic ascension that recalls Cybotron's Detroit techno classic "Clear".
James Gui

Magnus Kaslov

The Columns

Avant Rock
by Neil Kulkarni

Big Blood
First Aid Kit
Ba Da Bing DL/LP
A family band, made up of partners Caleb Mulkerin and Colleen Kinsella (from the now-defunct Cerberus Shoal) together with their 13 year old daughter Quinnisa on vocals. And my God, she's an absolute star. What a voice – as commanding as Stevie Nicks or Siouxsie over gorgeous arrangements of 1980s inflected rock. There's a big sound here but it was created at the family home with a production that blends in failed takes with final takes until songs start speaking to themselves, always with Quinnisa's vocals pulling you onwards. Repeated listens garner mucho hidden depths.

JAAW
Supercluster
Svart CD/DL/LP
The 1990s are back, let's WAAEURRGGGH like it. JAWW are a London based post-industrial supergroup of sorts (although the name you're most likely to know is Andy Cairns from Therapy?) and they make music that's clearly touched by 90s high points of industrial metal (Godflesh, Ministry, Nailbomb) but that also takes on post-2000 weirdness like Burial (the weird gaseous anti-presence of "Total Protonic Reversal"), Lightning Bolt and Deafkids. Songs like "Reality Crash" are hook-laden yet offer absolutely no escape or redemptive arc – rather, they utterly imprison you in this irrefutably mosh-worthy hall of mirrored noise, licks and melodies only driving the Stockholm Syndrome deeper.

Lo Egin
Volumancer
Panurus Productions/Dead Music Club DL/LP/MC
Doom with... a horn section? Not as odd as it might seem – there are antecedents to this Leeds band's sound when you think about God's *Anatomy Of Addiction*, Ihsahn's *On The Shores* or even the remarkable work of Messa on their recent records. When both riff and brass section coalesce as on the mighty pressure drops of opening track "Accursed Land" or the wickedly post-punk turbulence of "Arise", it works beautifully, saxes and trombones able to freewheel and skronk as much extra chaos into the mix as they can. Absolutely gagging to see Lo Egin live as I feel this kind of epic derangement has to be experienced in the flesh.

Megalith Levitation
Obscure Fire
Aesthetic Death CD/DL/MC
Doom bands don't ever just form like Voltron – in Megalithic Levitation's case, they apparently "materialised from the eternal void and acid vapours of Chelyabinsk, Russia in April 2016 to bare their psalms into this world". Heavy as hell and peppered with fantastically abyssal riffs, it's got a lovely sense of seething dissatisfaction to it, the vocals processed and phased into a slurry of pitiable discontent. Crucially this is a truly psychedelic doom record, as informed by the Brainfeeder roster as their metallic peers – and every single sound on colossi like "Of Eternal Doom" is twisted into gruesomeness, to the point where you start wondering if that meteor that hit Chelyabinsk in 2013 seeped radiation into the water supply.

Memorials
Music For Film: Tramps! & Women Against The Bomb
The state51 conspiracy 2xLP/MC
Verity Susman (Electrelane) and Matthew Simms (Wire) have been making soundtrack music together for the past decade and the two works that make up *Music For Film* were initiated in 2021. With its mix of gorgeous psyche, drones, improvisational noise and electronic pop, this album creates its own cinematic imagery in your consciousness as you listen and it's a divinely tuneful, yet confrontational racket . At no point during the squall of tracks like "Feel Of Time" and "Sportswear Couture" does the record's waywardness and mutability feel confected, curated or anything so ghastly as *crafted*. Rather, they feel like natural emanations from two intellects at play in an enormously wide open space, emanations then concisely shorn to maximum impact.

Teri Gender Bender
Catspeak EP
Clouds Hill DL/10"
Cracking alt pop from El Paso, Texas peppered with the spirits of Meat Puppets, The B-52's, Throwing Muses and Sasami. TGB's steely control over all proceedings – she plays and produces everything here – is clear from the off. There's a kind of intuitive togetherness to the playing on anthems like "Nicole Speaks Out" and "Outsider" that can only emerge from the hermetic solitude of the process, but it's the words and presence of Teri herself that really engages – as frontwoman of the Guadalajara based Le Butcherettes since 2007, she has honed a way of putting her songs across that's simultaneously intimate but also a performance, and those songs are moving testaments of difference and dissidence, celebrations of strength and individuality that are never cloying, always generous and giving.

Xasthur
Inevitably Dark
Prophecy/Lupus Lounge 2xCD/2xLP
If you don't know, Xasthur is a chap from California called Scott 'Malefic' Conner and he's been making records that range across black metal, dark ambient, acid folk (or doomgrass) since 1995. He retired the Xasthur moniker in 2010, and reconvened it in 2015 while insisting that his black metal days were over. With *Inevitably Dark* the black metal sounds have defiantly returned – this is some straight-up early Darkthrone style nastiness that combines the electronic sweep of 80s goth, strange passages of mediaeval psaltery, with the diseased dark riffola of early Mercyful Fate and Bathory, and good lord yes I'm having this in brackish ladlefuls, thank you very much.

Xysma
No Place Like Alone
Svart CD/DL/LP
Mad to think Finnish oddbods Xysma have been going for nigh on 35 years now, shifting from their early grindcore moves to classic hard rock to this new record which finds them playing a kind of raging yet glacial anthemic rock which might be their most instantly accessible formulation yet. In a really strange way I'm reminded of – bear with me – Rainbow on those first couple of Dio-vocalised records. There's a similar sense of propulsive groove and dazzlement to tracks like "Rowdy Barrel" and "Final Episode" but what's really strange is just how poppy this sounds, thanks in no doubt to the massive wedges of biteable synth constantly bubbling under the surface. You can imagine A-ha being proud of "Midnight Call", you can imagine "Model670" being that weird Eurovision entry that actually ends up winning. Absolutely not what I expected, and all the better for it.

Yakuza
Sutra
Svart CD/DL/LP
Chicago based Yakuza have been silent for a decade now but *Sutra* forms a welcome return for these avant metal oddities – like Megalithic Levitation they leave nothing pure here, plunge every vortex of their sound into a grinder that spews out songs somewhere between art rock, metal and post-hardcore. I'm reminded of those 1980s bands like Metal Church, Annihilator and Voivod, too weird to be straight-up metal but too goddamned pleasurable to be fully excised from metal's thrills and impact. Loving the dreampop melodies of "Alice" and the Meshuggah-style gnarliness of "Burn Before Reading" – this is a band at their best when shooting out ideas and jettisoning them with a dizzying sense of concision.

Critical Beats
by Chloe Lula

The Exaltics
The 7th Planet
Clone West Coast Series 2xLP
Across the prolific career of Jena, Germany's The Exaltics, two things have remained

consistent – first, that the artist behind the project Robert Witschakowski has operated in obscurity, donning a somewhat chilling drugstore robbery style hockey mask; second, a seemingly endless string of high calibre electro that continuously gains high scores. *The 7th Planet* is the latest in a discography that now spans at least 60 albums, singles and EPs to have come out in the last 20 years. It treads his usual stargazing soundscapes: plangent melodies, spacy synth work and ping-ponging (if somewhat rough and ready) 808 drums. Despite revisiting this playbook, his use of atmosphere and spatial placement is key to what makes The Exaltics' music so compelling. Highlights include melancholic respites like "Resurface" and "The Long Goodbye", dialled in over dusky dub-electro that feels truly timeless.

Flower Storm
Yek EP
Flower Storm DL/12"
Iranian-American artist Sepehr has earnestly woven Iranian tropes into his work for years, first with his 2020 breakout album *Shaytoon*, and then through his label of the same name, which exclusively platforms artists from the Iranian diaspora. Now he teams up with fellow Iranian producer Kasra V for a multidisciplinary project that more fully and explicitly gives shape to these ideas. *Yek* (*One* in Farsi) overlays classic Iranian instruments like the daf, tonbak and santoor with sampled vocals and the duo's own sleek electronica. The songs, devoid of the extra narrative context, are excellent unto themselves, splitting the difference between sludgy slow burners and sleek drum 'n' bass. Crushed, torn apart and reassembled, the samples add a more powerful dynamic to these compositions by putting relics of cultural history into playful conversation with the present. The result is a daring and innovative take on contemporary techno and electro – and a much needed burst of originality in today's still too homogenous dance music landscape.

Function
Green EP
Infrastructure New York DL/12"
As a devoted acolyte of mid-2000s techno, I was thrilled to receive Function's new EP on his newly revitalised Infrastructure New York imprint. According to the press text, *Green* is a paean to the day in 2007 when David Sumner aka Function first arrived in Germany with his green suitcase. True to its promise, the four-tracker is cast in dark and etheric hues that recall his Berlin era oeuvre as well as his work as Sandwell District – the now defunct collective he formed with Female, Regis and Silent Servant – with whom he first released that fateful year. Opener "Initiation" emits the same backlit glow as that group's early output. Closer "Desire And Memory (Live Extraction)" is consistent with the ambient menace of the four to the floor hits Sumner put out in 2013 (cf *Incubation* on Ostgut Ton), whose propulsive grooves were preordained for the Berghain dance floor. But of all *Green*'s tracks, "Aeternum (Meridian)" takes the cake – sprawling out in loops of mesmerizing hypnotica, it conjures images of Sumner walking through Berlin's stark streets, a bag in his hand, a foot poised on the threshold of possibility.

Ron Morelli
Heart Stopper
LIES DL/2xLP
Ron Morelli's latest is the LIES imprint's 200th release but his first ever full-length for the label. The accompanying promo says I should expect 11 tracks of relatively uncharacteristic disco house. *Heart Stopper* is certainly a departure from the caustic emotional timbre of his past output, but it's more expansive than the press release would suggest, recalling the musical tug of war between punk and dance music best exemplified by archival albums like Tom Of England's wonderfully funky and fucked-up *Sex Monk Blues*, or the doleful ambience of KWC 92's *Night Drive*. The set contains elements of frosty new wave ("Tangled Trap Of Love") alongside gestures towards the blown out, straight to tape sounds that put the label on the map ("House Music Revenge" and "Time Stands Still"). But Morelli is at his best in the beautifully understated moments that punctuate dancier cuts like the deeply melancholic and pensive compositions "Natural Deaths" and "Ron's Torture".

Nikos
Metaturnal EP
Flippen Disks DL
Fans of the subdued yet spellbinding aesthetic of artists like Konduku and Forest Drive West will rejoice in the standout label debut from Nikos, a Rotterdam based producer and sound artist who seems to have already mastered this dexterous style of club-ready electronica. The four tracks of *Metaturnal* offer a masterclass in minimal music. Opener "Critter" siphons off inspiration from techno, dub and psytrance, intertwining pulsing synths with metallic polyrhythms that pitter-patter across the techno grid. "Cilia" is a four to the floor party starter, building an energetic whirl of incandescent basslines to dizzying effect. As the EP's darkest and most introspective production, the low swung "Nothing To Undo" is the one I return to again and again.

Shedding Skin
Various
BITE DL/3xLP
Since its inception five years ago, Phase Fatale's Berlin based imprint BITE has been a faithful purveyor of the sound he's helped codify within the electronic music canon: moody, EBM-infused club cuts that fuse techno with Wax Trax-era post-punk and industrial. On this anniversary compilation, he brings together a host of producers close to the label (as well as to the Tbilisi institution Khidi, where he holds a second residency) who best exemplify this particular dynamic range. But there are also welcome diversions from the brooding sound signature, including the swelling atmospherics of Nastya Vogan's "Serpenteion", the dense percussive thickets of Vulkanski's"Quitting Discipline", and the biting abrasion of Omon Breaker's "Stinger", which leans towards ghetto tech at its most

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exhilarating. Together, the selection paints a picture of a label that's expertly harnessed the sentiment and flair of times gone by, albeit with a curatorial approach that firmly cements its output to today.

Dub & Reggae
by Steve Barker

Rhoda Dakar
Version Girl
Sunday Best LP
Back in the early 1980s days of The Specials' Coventry based 2 Tone label, Rhoda Dakar was in The Bodysnatchers, an all-female band who were perhaps too much in the shadow of The Selecter, featuring the more dominating presence of Pauline Black. So it's great to hear this excellent Dakar set of well-chosen leftfield pop covers rinsed in ska, rocksteady and reggae. The title is taken from a Dandy Livingstone single – Bodysnatchers covered Livingstone with their first single "Let's Do Rocksteady". Here Dakar covers country with "Walking After Midnight" and "Love Hurts", but the outstanding cuts are her takes on The Kinks' "Stop Your Sobbing", as once claimed by The Pretenders, and a remarkably affecting reggae treatment of the old Louis Armstrong chestnut "What A Wonderful World" – Armstrong was a friend of Rhoda's father, with whom he worked in 1920s and 30s Paris.

Horace Ferguson
Sensi Addict
333 DL/LP
A timely reissue for this critical dancehall album, mostly digital, produced by Prince Jazzbo on his Ujama label in 1987 when the sonic waves of the "Sleng Teng" and "Tempo" riddims and their mutant variants were still dominant. The set collates a selection of vocals recorded between 1984–87 at Michael Carroll's Creative Sounds studio in Kingston with engineer Paul Davidson. Ferguson drapes his eerie falsetto across a selection of Jazzbo's strongest digital rhythms, especially the spookily woozy "Replay" version on "Jah Order". The London based Honest Jon's shop and label revived a 12" back in 2007. Also here is a drunken master retake on that "Sleng Teng" riddim on the fizzing "Tranquilizer" – how Jazzbo managed to get such exciting results from the most minimal of rhythms is the magic here. Most of these rhythm tracks were generated by the recently deceased Tyrone Downie – longtime member of The Wailers during the 70s – and Tony 'Asher' Brissett. Also included are a couple of early 80s tracks recorded for Jazzbo by Roots Radics.

Phillip Frazer
Come Ethiopians (Deluxe Edition)
Patate LP
Learning his craft alongside King Tubby, Phillip Fraser was a key part of the Freedom Sounds collective in the late 1970s with childhood friend Prince Allah, Earl Zero and Bertram Brown who launched the label. Together, they produced some of the toughest roots music coming out of Jamaica with The Soul Syndicate band. This album is a reissue of his strongest album *Come Ethiopians*, with the welcome addition of a couple of bonus dub tracks. It includes extended versions: the standout "John Saw Them Coming (In Disco Style)" and "Troubles (In Disco Style)", lyrically reflecting ghetto living. The set ends with the Prince Alla collaboration "Black Rose", a version of his mighty "Stone". More dubs and versions can be located on Patate's excellent Bandcamp site.

Impact All Stars
Clive Chin Presents Randy's Dub
Only Roots LP
Released on Impact with untitled tracks in 1976 in a pressing of only 200, *Clive Chin Presents Randy's Dub* is now back in circulation with properly identified tracks in this vinyl only edition. The set later formed the core of Blood & Fire's exemplary dub from Randy's *Forward The Bass* in 1998. Though Errol Thompson had been a key engineer at Randy's studio, this collection was mixed by Clive Chin and Karl Pitterson, who had just finished mixing Bunny Wailer's *Blackheart Man*. Although these dubs can be considered conservative compared to what was happening over at Tubby's studio, their stripped-bare rhythms showcase top class work from Skin Flesh & Bones, The Wailers Band and The In Crowd in what might be called pure drum and bass exercises.

Louisa 'Markswoman' Mark
Breakout
Soulgramma LP
Born in North West London's Kensal Rise in 1960, Louisa Mark was already working as a guest vocalist on Dennis Bovell's Sufferers Sound System at the age of 14. She won a Star Search talent contest for ten weeks running at Dalston's Four Aces club, where Lloydie Coxsone provided dubplates for the contestants. Coxsone took the now 15 year old Mark into Gooseberry studios where she cut the first lovers rock single, her cover of Robert Parker's "Caught You In A Lie", backed by Matumbi. The 45 made such a splash that it was released in Jamaica by Gussie Clarke. After completing her education, Trojan House producer Clem Bushay took her into the studio to record her debut album *Breakout*, which included the hit tune "6 Sixth Street" – a track so strong it received a stunning deejay treatment from Trinity. This vinyl only revive replicates the original set's tracklist and artwork.

Max Romeo
Every Man Ought To Know
VP Records/17 North Parade LP
Some years ago Carter van Pelt found the relatively unscathed 50 year old reel-to-reel tape of this obscure Max Romeo set while going through VP archives. First released by Count Shelly in the UK in 1974, it continued the singer's long association with producer Bunny 'Striker' Lee, a year prior to cutting his breakthrough *Revelation Time* with Lee Perry. Many of the album's tracks had been released as singles. Romeo had already experienced a long period of success following his notorious "Wet Dream" single in 1968 ,which he followed with scatterings of other slack tunes. Here he mixes up things with Rasta plaints, socially conscious observations, relationship matters and lovers tunes while still managing to throw in a couple of dodgy ditties at the close, the standout track being "Rent Crisis". Perhaps one for Romeo fans only.

Tyrone Taylor/Black Disciples
Life Table/Turning
Wolf 7"
The late Jamaica born singer Tyrone Taylor was best known for the feelgood lovers rock sucker punch of the massive 1981 worldwide hit "Cottage In Negril". But in the 70s he freelanced for producers like Sydney Crooks, Niney The Observer (the ultra-dread "Sufferation", a big tune for cultural punks of the time) and Jack Ruby, producer of Burning Spear's epochal *Marcus Garvey*, released in Jamaica on the Wolf label, which is where we find this top notch revive 45. The arrangement is clearly from the same pedigree of Spear, with its luscious sympathetic horns and Taylor adapting his croon to a deep roots style. A sumptuously relaxed version from The Black Disciples is on the flip.

King Tubby & The Observer All Stars
Dubbing With The Observer 1974–1976
Doctor Bird 2xCD
Released by Attack in the UK, 1975's *Dubbing With The Observer* was among the very first dub albums to become commercially successful on both sides of the Atlantic. It's not an album as such but a collection of version sides produced by Winston 'Niney' Holness and mixed by the dubmaster King Tubby, featuring foundation-style killer mixes of vocal tracks by the likes of Dennis Brown, Ken Boothe, Delroy Wilson and Sang Hugh. Even though Tubby had a number of critical partnerships, including Harry Mudie, Yabby You, Bunny Lee and Augustus Pablo, it's arguable that the work he did for Niney was when he was at his experimental heights. This truly seminal album finally receives the deluxe treatment with 22 tracks new to CD, but not throwaways! Included here is "Zinc Fence", the dub to Cornell Campbell's "I Heart Is Clean", "Bottlehead In Fine Style" and "Dub Roots Of David" versions to Dennis Brown's "Live After You" ,and his take on The Gaylads' classic "Africa".

Electronics
by Steph Kretowicz

Angel-Ho
Angel-Ho
Bandcamp DL
Another release from the NON Worldwide co-founder, whose mid-2010s noise and deconstructed music experiments – see the *Ascension* and *Emancipation* EPs – gave way to more elementary attempts at vocal led pop with 2019's *Death Becomes Her*, released via Hyperdub. Despite having a strong roster of contributions from post-club heavyweights like Asma Maroof and Gaika, the attempt felt unwieldly and undercooked. A follow-up EP, *Alla Prima* – produced by Bon in 2020 – fared better, benefitting from an oozing bass treatment. This self-titled and self-released

follow up, however, misses the mark entirely, with Angel-Ho herself handling writing and performing, production and mastering. The result is a decidedly lo-fi and DIY homage to old school vogue, disco, synth pop and gogo, replete with sounds and presets that echo 1980s and 90s pop, and an ungainly mix that makes one wonder whether a return to the *Red Devil* era of their early post-club production might serve the artist best.

Caterina Barbieri
Myuthafoo
Light-Years CD/DL/LP
The Italian producer shares a sister album to the reissue of her 2019 album for Editions Mego, *Ecstatic Computation*, this time via her own Light-Years label. That record represented something of a stumble out of her usual bare bones compositional style of modular synthesis, with an attempt at classically focused art pop, underscored by her collaboration with Lyra Pramuk on "Knot Of Spirit", which reappears here as an instrumental "Synth Version". If *Ecstatic Computation* felt like a confounding digression from her minimalist practice of exploring the psychoactive effects of repetition, this one marks a circle back to that almost scientific examination of subjective experience. Whether it's the rush of square wave sequencing on "Math Of You" or the wandering ambient current of "Alphabet Of Light", *Myuthafoo* reveals the emotional core of machines straddling analogue and electronic formats.

Christina Kubisch
PLUS
Edition DUR DL/LP
Gesturing towards the Berlin based composer, musician and performance artist's synaesthetic practice, the B side of *PLUS* features a 25 minute recording of a site-specific audiobook inspired by pottery and produced for German radio. The title "Vasenresonanz" translates to "Vase Resonance" and follows a collage of field recordings, tones and spoken word that crosses the phonetic boundaries of sound and meaning. A playful and peculiar track on the A side called "Teatime" carries this study further, as a male voice overlaying environmental bird song mimics its avian counterpart with layered vocal scats that switch between onomatopoeiac gibberish and enunciated English. Famous for her ability to transfer and distort meaning across formats and materials, Kubisch's indefinable audio sits well with the Edition DUR mission statement of purveying music that "does not fit into the classic pigeonholes".

NikNak
Night
First Terrace DL/MC
Exploring the strange liminality of twilight, the London based DJ and experimental turntablist applies a sensibility for frayed beauty to night time field recordings of Portugal made in 2016, and samples of NASA space missions. Manipulated live on decks and assembled over a period of two years, the cracks and scratches of records are slowed, distorted and blown out into subaqueous expanses of space from the depths of the inner mind. "Fireflies P1" opens with the magnified surface noise of a turning record, giving a sense of the microscopic in a macro state, as audio from mission control scrapes in and out of earshot. The howls and grunts of unseen predators recede into the environmental sounds of rainfall in "Wails". A slow moving and thoughtful ambient record, *Night* gently moves through the hours of dusk to dawn.

Parish
Cascades Of Refinement
Important CD/DL
Regarded as a major influence in the development of the vaporwave microgenre, a one-off anonymous release by Parish Bracha as Disconscious in 2013 came to define the slowed down smooth jazz and warped easy listening subculture when it was briefly referred to as mallsoft. *Hologram Plaza* was a formative piece of anti-corporate elevator music, conceptually grounded in an implicit critique of the numbing effects of capitalist culture with the uneasy-dreamy muzak of tracks like "Mattress Store" and "Shopping Delirium". Bracha here follows up his re-emergence on Arca's 2020 *Mutants Vol 1* mixtape under the Parish mononym (with "Cascade II") with a series of analogue meets digital experiments that expand on the resonant vibrations of dazzling, piano-led ambient. Here, the sustained keys quiver in a cavernous space that swells with exaltation, transcending the corporeality of consumer culture and rising toward evanescent rapture.

Sabiwa
No 16: Memories Of Future Landscapes
Phantom Limb DL/MC
From the Brighton based label that brought us work from Senyawa, Loraine James and Richard Skelton, Sabiwa's production is as multifaceted as you'd expect from the Phantom Limb roster. The Berlin based producer combines traditional folk music from her native Taiwan with field recordings, rhythm and vocals stretched and glitched across surreal, sometimes dissonant, sometimes droning atmospheres. A growling ambience follows the nature-mimicking high vocal pitches on "Pupa", while a stuttering rhythm and the scratching, screeching strings of "Dog Smells Your Future" blunders into bass heavy echo. A standout is the ten minute vocal number "Christal" where the producer's uncle sings a forbidden song of Taiwanese independence during pre-1945 Japanese rule, beginning in a cappella and slowly submerged into a vortex of pads and polyrhythms.

Global
by Francis Gooding

Altın Gün
Aşk
Glitterbeat CD/DL/LP
Altın Gün's last album, 2021's *Yol*, dabbled thoughtfully with a modish funk sound, but the Netherlands based outfit return to the

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heartwood on *Aşk*, an album of end to end modernised Anadolu psych burners. The group's take on their core material has never been overly reverent, but they are in masterful command of the style's essence, and their previous excursions beyond the boundaries mean they can keep it fully upgraded for novel deployments on cuts like the razor-sharp "Çıt Çıt Çedene".

Danûk
Morîk
Omni CD/DL
The exiled Syrian musicians of Danûk came together in Istanbul in 2015. As musically talented graduates of Syria's finest conservatoires and art schools, they began to busk on the city's streets, where they were spotted and invited to compose for radio and film, a break that sent them on their way. *Morîk* is their recording debut, a lovingly treated amalgam of historic Kurdish and Syrian material played on both Western and Middle Eastern instruments, and including a handful of folk and religious songs drawn from wax cylinders recorded in the early years of the 20th century. Lucidly produced, the music has a certain insistent momentum common in the work of exiled artists: part echo of flight, part pent up desire for return.

Invernomuto
Vernascacadabra
Xing LP
Tootling gallery space faux-klore from Italian art duo Invernamuto, who are trying to "open up a heterodox vocabulary" by using ocarinas to make "raw dance music". Drawing on the improbable combo of imaginary medieval sounds and UK drill – the latter reference being tastelessly underlined by knife-sharpening sounds and a sample of someone saying *"ching him, ching him"* at random – raw is just about admissible, but dance music is a stretch. If you concentrate really hard on not thinking about it or listening too closely, some of *Vernascacadabra* is quite fun: "Dreamcatcher" is like a novelty rendition of a beat rejected by a third tier Wu-Tang affiliate, and "Freddy" conjures as much menace as inexpertly played ocarinas can manage. The whole thing sounds like the poor cousin of a TikTok-viral ocarina version of "Still Dre", which is possibly deliberate.

Domenico Lancellotti
Sramba
Mais Um Discos DL/LP
Another Lisbon transplant alongside Dias Gomes, Domenico Lancellotti too was a fixture of the Rio scene, having played and produced widely in the 2000s as a member of +2 with Moreno Veloso and Kassin. *Sramba* forcefully scrambles the Brazilian code, serving up outro tempo machine sambas that tacitly reach back beyond bossa, jazz and MPB toward the deep percussive roots of the music. "Aterrizar", for instance, recalls the bottom end churn of Orquestra Afro-Brasileira. Lancellotti sings and plays guitar in fairly classic mode, but collaborator Dias Gomes's synths have deftly gutted the samba format and replaced its insides with gurgling, scraping modular clockwork, thick with bass and percussion.

Lo Escucho, Lo Pinto
Lo Escucho, Lo Pinto
All Night Flight DL/LP
A collaboration between Chilean free rock unit Glorias Navales and London based improvising musician Sholto Dobie (profiled by Claire Sawers in *The Wire* 423), the numinous and absorbing *Lo Escucho, Lo Pinto* walks along disappearing lines and threatens to disappear along with them. Spontaneously created in various Chilean cities, the group set up in public places without informing anyone or advertising their presence, and started to record, capturing not only themselves, but the sounds of people in conversation, dogs, children, birds and traffic. This gives the album the aura of a field recording, an impression intensified by the music: spectral and gauzy, the tracks unspool like extended tune-ups, gradually coalescing into loosely woven improvisations amid the ambient noise and crosstalk. They dissolve as subtly as they began, leaving the feeling of having witnessed a secret confession.

Rogé
Curyman
Diamond West DL/LP
Contemporary Brazilian samba artist Rogé was last spotted with in duo with Seu Jorge on one of Night Dreamer's direct to disc sets, a format which expertly stripped the music of any studio-added floweriness. Curyman takes a different tack, but with Arthur Verocai in command of the string arrangements, the floristry is exquisite. Rogé himself recently moved from to Rio to Los Angeles, where he has evidently plugged into the now firmly established post-Daptone network of retro-funk producers and groups – in this case ex-Dap-King Thomas Brenneck, who provides the leader with sympathetic and perfectly weighted soul samba settings, which tend thoughtfully toward Terry Callier territory on cuts like "Existe Uma Voz". It's all gloriously light on its feet, but the seriousness and brilliance of Verocai's strings add a widescreen emotional maturity that feels genuinely rare.

Namian Sidibé
Namian Sidibé
Sahel Sounds DL/LP
Namian Sidibé is a star in Bamako, and it's easy to see why: her voice and poise make her a natural successor to the line of Oumou Sangaré and Nahawa Doumbia, and she has impeccable pedigree, having been taught her art by Niamy Diabeté, performer with Mali's mighty Rail Band. Like Sangaré and Doumbia, Sidibé sings music derived from sumu – a praise form, whose performers are hired for weddings, baptisms and other social occasions, but which is easily turned toward social commentary and political observation. Accompaniment is limited to Jules Diabeté's dry, talkative guitar, but there's nothing austere about the music: Sidibé's voice is as rich as spun gold, and she holds court with irresistible charisma.

This Is Zologo Beat
Various
Makkum CD/DL/LP
Out of Francis Ayamga's Top Link studio in Bongo, northeastern Ghana, and straight to a soundboy head: an overload of the high energy synth and bass pop that is currently flavour of the month in the Fare-Fare speaking district that is also home to kologo boss King Ayisoba. Ayamga has long been a member of Ayisoba's band, and his production smarts helped to crown Ayisoba across Ghana; the zologo sound that Makkum showcases here has much in common with kologo, but foregoes the eponymous two-string lute in favour of strictly digital backing, and is more rhythmically omnivorous. Zologo means crazy, and this spare music runs at fierce intensity: stuttering bass kicks, digi-shekere and cursory synth stabs, topped with urgent call and response vocals. Opener "Tu Daana" by Sammy kicks things off in fairly pedestrian fashion with a talking drum beat and subtle Auto-Tune, but Fadester's "Guru Anowuu" steps into the prang zone with tachycardiac bpm, effects squelched vocals and seesawing bass, while FCL's speed-rapped "Zom Koom" is summery bashment pop. Kologo star Prince Buju's reasonings on "Life Is A Mission" are backed by rare excursion into denser, slower production.

Hiphop & R&B
by Tim Fish

Claude Cooper & Brain Fog
More Myriad Sounds
Friendly DL/LP
Anonymity reigns supreme on *More Myriad Sounds*, with Bristol's Claude Cooper and Brooklyn's Brain Fog masking themselves behind pseudonyms. The positives of this approach place the music in focus. The set is infused with the same psychedelic sound as Cooper's instrumental predecessor *Myriad Sounds*. This time round he combines it with the raw, punk-like vocal of Brain Fog, who tears through a wide range of beats that never stray far enough for the album to lose any cohesion. The dominant forces of jazz and funk hark back to hiphop past, even as the results are compellingly fresh.

High Bias
Various
Backwoodz Studioz DL/MC
I'm not normally given over to surprises but this unexpected arrival from the ever strengthening Backwoodz Studioz label was a happy exception to the rule. Curated by billy woods, the *High Bias* compilation/mixtape is a dizzying showcase of both the label and the artists who can be found in its orbit. It consists mostly of unheard and unreleased material, with tracks like DJ Haram's infectious "Mescalito Remix" thrown in for good measure. Appearances from the likes of AKAI SOLO and Breezly Brewin cement Backwoodz's standing as a bridge between consecutive generations of New York's underground rap scene. Finally, tracks like Cavalier's "Meta" hint at what Backwoodz has got lined up for the future.

ILLAMAN & Pitch 92
Sometimes Relax
Potent Funk DL
London based label Potent Funk welcomes local producer Pitch 92 into their ranks with this collaborative set alongside fellow Londoner ILLAMAN. A far cry from ILLAMAN's anarchic work with the punk-grime outfit PENGSHUi, *Sometimes Relax* presents a more vulnerable lyricist, whose personal journey over the last few years fuels a more heartwarming fire. ILLAMAN might venture across all manner of genres, but this latest offering is a strictly hiphop affair, thanks to Pitch's production, which absorbs just enough of the listener's interest without drawing focus away from the vocal impact. The resulting album raises the bar for two artists I already held in high regard.

Fatboi Sharif & Roper Williams
Planet Unfaithful
POW DL
A welcome return from New Jersey duo Fatboi Sharif & Roper Williams, as they lay waste to the potential doom associated with follow-up projects. Not that we should have had any reason to doubt that they could regain the same level of leftfield brilliance that captured our attention with their 2021 album *Gandhi Loves Children*. As individuals, they sit atop catalogues of arresting releases, so their combined might places them among the most interesting MC-producer duos of the current era. *Planet Unfaithful* feels both decisive and impulsive, with any prior expectations validated while also prompting the feeling that you never know what's coming next. Elucid and Bruiser Wolf provide some finishing touches to an EP that lingers after the last notes fade.

AJ Suede & Televangel
Parthian Shots
Fake Four Inc DL/LP
Released by the Connecticut label Fake Four Inc, AJ Suede and Televangel's second collaboration *Parthian Shots* reveals that their rightly lauded debut album *Metatron's Cube* was no fluke. From the strength of its meandering key-driven first single "All That Jazz", to the woozy Rich Jones assisted closer "Goodbye", *Parthian Shots* never falters. Suede's flow might come across as laidback but his striking lyricism warrants further scrutiny. The same goes for Televangel's production, which maintains an atmosphere without ever becoming overpowering. It's got some strong guest spots, too, from the likes of Mr MFN eXquire, Milc and Bruiser Wolf, all of them worthy additions to the mix. Historically, a Parthian shot is an ancient Iranian cavalry hit and run tactic. I'm hoping the duo naming their album *Parthian Shots* isn't meant to indicate their partnership is over.

TMFSE x Shape
Naked Brunch
WATKK DL/MC
The title is more than an obvious nod to William S Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*. Written and recorded inside the confines of a rehab facility, *Naked Brunch* is an unflinching ode to addiction, detailing the pain and torment spreading from its epicentre. TMFSE is the perfect narrator, candidly recounting his painful history without any hint of self-pity. Shape's production proves to be the ideal counterpart, with eerie samples and heavy drums adding to the album's distorted grimace. An important release and yet another win for everyone at We Are The Karma Kids (WATKK).

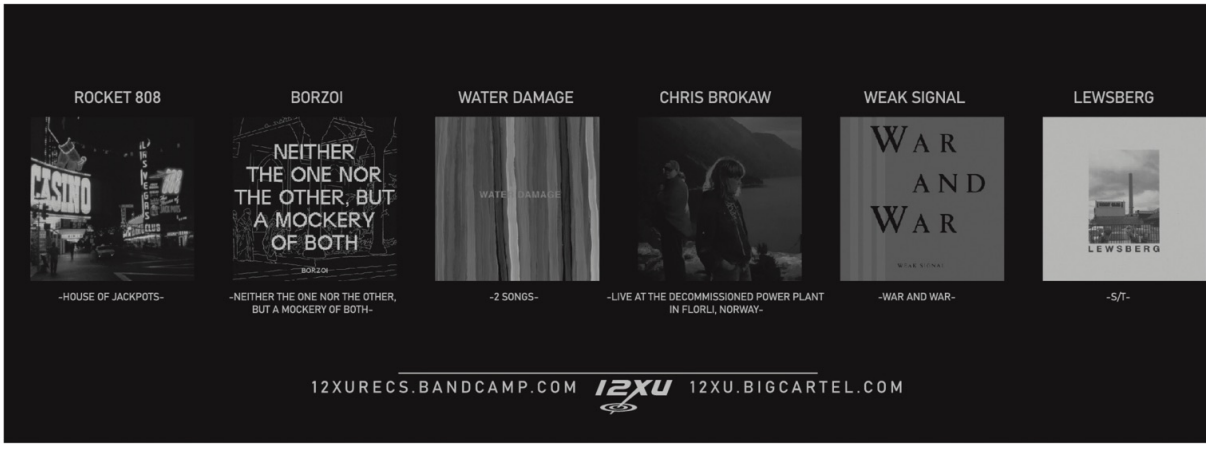
Jazz & Improv by Bill Meyer

Lina Allemano Four
Pipe Dream
LUMO CD/DL
Canadian trumpeter Lina Allemano typically splits her time between Toronto and Berlin, and between the two cities she leads five bands. The Four, who've existed with varying line-ups for 20 years, is the most enduring – *Pipe Dream* is their eight album. Allemano wrote its music during the initial 2020 lockdown, so while the dire times influenced what she titled the compositions, enforced inactivity contributed to their detail and complexity. It's a testament to the saxophonist Brodie West, drummer Nick Fraser and bassist Andrew Downing's grasp of her intentions that these multi-sectioned chamber pieces flow so naturally.

Seth Andrew Davis/Alex Cunningham/Damon Smith/Weasel Walter
Branches Choke
Storm Cellar/Mother Brain CD/DL
This session took place on electronics composer and improvisor Seth Andrew Davis's home turf of Kansas City, Missouri, which just goes to show that elbows out free improvisation can happen anywhere that musicians with the will and the acumen can find a place to play. Bassist Damon Smith and drummer Weasel Walter bring depth and commitment – both have strong opinions about what makes free music worth hearing, and their hyper-detailed, mercurial playing lives up to their own standards here. Cunningham's abrasive violin and Davis's effects-warped electric guitar step up to the challenge, which makes for gripping, uneasy listening. The album is aptly named; you could easily get stuck in the places where their prickly jabs and coarse, jagged lines converge and snarl.

Michael Doneda/Alexander Frangenheim/Roger Turner
Nail In Ulrichsberg
Concepts Of Doing CD/DL
Soprano saxophonist Michel Doneda is French, bassist Alexander Frangenheim is German, and drummer Roger Turner is English, but they speak a common tongue throughout this perpetually on-point exchange. No one leads, they act as one, and the moments transitioning in and out of silence are particularly charged. They trade darting gestures, distressed timbres and abrupt shifts in direction while unearthing scraps of allusive lyricism within woolly thickets of concentrated interaction.

Nava Dunkelman & gabby fluke-mogul
Likht
Relative Pitch CD/DL
Titled after the Yiddish word for light, this duo strive openly for incandescence. Brooklyn based percussionist Nava Dunkelman and violinist gabby fluke-mogul situate free improvisation within a web of other practices, musical and otherwise. Performance videos reveal the duo's dance-informed command of visual presence, and one can hear Chinese ceremonial music in Dunkelman's charged



cymbal crashes. Fluke-mogul's unrestrained bowing moves easily across a spectrum from classical to folk. Things really immolate on "Lust", which sacrifices a scrap of Ornette Coleman's "Lonely Woman" on a bonfire of feverish thrashing.

Jason Kahn/Frantz Loriot/Christian Wolfarth
Köln
Editions CD/DL
This Swiss trio combine two pre-existing duos, each of which includes percussionist Christian Wolfarth. The possibility that the combination would scramble already established dynamics may have been amplified by the uncertainty about what Jason Kahn, who has cycled through several different instruments in recent years, would play. His tools of choice this time were analogue electronics and radio, whose charged abrasions contrast felicitously with the scrape of Loriot's unamplified viola and Wolfarth's restless patter and pitiless scrapes. While no one here plays gently, neither do they get particularly loud; the listener is invited to listen actively and project their attention into the music's blind corners and empty spaces.

Paul Lytton & Ken Vandermark
Distant Cousins
Audiographic DL/LP
Paul Lytton has been playing percussion with Ken Vandermark in diverse settings for over a quarter century, and with Nate Wooley for a decade. They were set to tour the northeastern US as a trio in March 2020, but the sudden Covid shutdown meant that only one gig took place before Lytton had to make haste back to Europe, and Wooley didn't make it. This record documents that concert, which for many, including this writer, was the last that they would attend for a long time. While there was plenty of unease in the air, the performance projects a bracing singularity of purpose. Both musicians sound very free in each other's company to simply be themselves, although Vandermark does de-emphasise the rhythmic quality of his playing, which helps his burly but nimble figures to co-exist felicitously with the stringing, arrhythmic spray of sound that flows from Lytton's drum kit.

Perch Hen Brock & Rain
Elegiacal
Wig CD/DL
It's easy to see how Ig Henneman, Ingrid Laubrock and Tom Rainey got the nicknames that make up this combo's name, but what makes Ab Baars Perch? Is it his stance, or a favourite fish? Likewise, the second recording by this quartet, which is made up of two duos who are also couples, does not really live up to its name; it's more inquisitive than mournful. Maybe red herrings are just how they roll. While there's plenty of nuanced interplay, sharply turned angles and intriguingly contrasting woodwind tonalities, it's boat-rocking moments like the slurred diction of Henneman's viola on "Old West Blues" and Tom Rainey's periodic percussive koans that push this session beyond collegiality into collectively creative engagement.

Ivo Perelman/Matthew Shipp/Jeff Cosgrove
Live In Carrboro
Soul City CD/DL
Drummer Jeff Cosgrove is the hometown host of this concert set. *Live In Carrboro* is his second recording with tenor saxophonist Ivo Perelman and pianist Matthew Shipp, whose partnership began in 1996 and comprises upwards of 40 discs. This one offers few new wrinkles in the fabric but affirms their familiar combination of brooding tension and ecstatic release. Cosgrove is a deferential colourist, closely shadowing Shipp's gradually ascending figures and darting asides. Early on, Perelman inhabits a stratospheric zone of his own, relying on Shipp to have his back. The second half of this concert recording feels more interactive and satisfying.

Yuri Vikharev/Juris Āķis/ Einārs Raibais
The Lost Latvian TV Studio Sessions 1967
Jersika DL/LP
Those who lament the homogenising effect that jazz education has upon young players might be curious to hear this set. Not only were there no jazz schools in the Soviet Union during the 1960s, you could barely get records. The most reliable way to hear the music was to tune into the Voice Of America, but Leningrad based pianist Yuri Vikharev found another way: he contributed a column about jazz in the USSR to *DownBeat* magazine and got paid in records. The contents of this record suggest that some Columbia promos showed up in his mailbox. *The Lost Latvian TV Studio Sessions 1967* brings rehearsal sessions that Vikharev played with a local rhythm section the day before an appearance on Latvian television. Aside from a couple of dropouts, the tape's antiquity is not an issue and the trio's playing is fluent. A lengthy performance of Miles Davis's "So What" slips in and out of free territory without tripping up, and they blow through Thelonious Monk's "Well, You Needn't" at a velocity more akin to Bud Powell's. Vikharev's sole original is less adventurous. The riskiest thing about "Znakomstvo – Delo Sluchaja", whose theme would fit easily onto a Vince Guaraldi record, is how fast bassist Juris Āķis and drummer Einārs Raibais play its bossa nova beat.

Noise, Industrial & Beyond
by Raymond Cummings

Beam Splitter
Split Jaw
Triptiks Tapes DL/MC
On their second full-length *Split Jaw*, Beam Splitter go electric and are reborn as a very different beast. The duo – Berlin based vocalist Audrey Chen and trombonist Henrik Munkeby Nørstebø of Trondheim – built 2017's *Rough Tongue* as an extended series of low voltage snacks. Chen's impressionist instrument is capable of wordless pleading, horror, giddiness, sickness, exasperation, satisfaction, amusement and beyond; it made a fitting foil for Nørstebø's muffled passing airliner blats. Broken into three intense movements, *Split Jaw* amplifies the trombone and adds feedback, sound files and electronics to the recipe. Shrill, keening "Breastbone" stuns; the mercurial "Down To Rock And Up To Fire" stammers and wails towards melody. "Purple Mouth" begins like a penal electrocution, confrontational scree stabs and vocal distensions intermingled and sometimes interchangeable, before yielding to aching tension and Chen's exquisite glossolalia.

Blood Of Chhinnamastika
Hymn To Bagalamukhi
Abhorrent AD DL/MC
Over the last several years, Oakland, California's Dario Puga has perpetuated a sort of windswept, ventilated harsh noise wall as Blood Of Chhinnamastika. For a raw, hard entree to this ethos, seek out 2021's *Live/Death. Hymn To Bagalamukhi* brings more sweet, shredded pain to bear, tagged with blown-out black metal screams. The A side crackles, squeaks and strains with a particular fury that at moments shorts the signal out entirely before surging back to flame nearby countrysides and hamlets to cinders. Far heavier on echo and reverb, the B side has the feel of a manifesto force-fed through a malfunctioning vacuum tube television set; the signal sucks and the picture is addled, but the passion's irrefutable.

JoAnn McNeil
digital/synth/untitled 0
Bandcamp DL
New compositions appear on JoAnn McNeil's Bandcamp page only infrequently. Unlike the longer, older, wilder adventures that reside on her SoundCloud page, these missives from the St Louis, Missouri musician, fine artist and live performer resemble sketches or tiny canvases. More care and finesse appears to have gone into *digital/synth/untitled 0*, a beguiling seven minute sled ride through various moods. Sharp, cricketing noise prickles the hairs at the nape of the neck before Laurie Spiegel-esque synth inquisitiveness gives way to wobbly, atonal drones and quietly scurrying felicity.

Primitive Wings
Morphosis
Satatuhatta CD/DL
This debut from Finnish artist Jaakko Vanhala's new project Primitive Wings has the grubby, desperate feel of a thousand smash and grab robberies happening simultaneously. Knotted and scrambling, *Morphosis* overflows with effects layered and cycled at engaging, gnarled intensities. "Concealed By Ferns" rips figurative stretches of duct tape away from stippled, sour beat matrices. "Signal In The Canopy" suggests a conveyor belt accelerated too severely, with malice, as every person and object in town is whipped off of it and into the ether. "One Star" is the sound of being chased through the woods at night by drug hallucinations or space aliens, until the pursuers are victorious, and even sated. If it's danger and urgency and nocturnal dynamite you're craving, get hip.

Rump State
Retaliation Aesthetics
No Lagos Musique DL/ LP
Norwegian musician Gaute Granli is fond of lurching, rippling weirdness, laced with

multitracked vocals, effects and guitars. New York based former Sightings member Mark Morgan is prone to warbling over barbed wired, thermite-spiced guitar riffs and fierce pedals. Granli and Morgan are very good at what they do – and what they do is not entirely dissimilar. Collaborating as Rump State allows them to profitably do what they do together. On their debut LP *Retaliation Aesthetics*, this melding of solo styles pays dividends, widening and deepening the duo's dissociative static gyre. Their voices are merged and rendered as a jittery, repeated sample on the disorientingly angelic "Derealization Freeloaders". where strings sting and buzz like colliding bumble bees. "Mystic Day Trader" finds bliss in a dense forest of bummer trip chords that ooze from the speakers. Closer "Cemetery Gun" transmutes this sound into a face-melting, malevolent slurry, folding and refolding the shrapnel until a quaking groove asserts itself.

Doug Wieselman
WA-Zoh
figureight DL/LP
New York based clarinettist/saxophonist Doug Wieselman has enjoyed a long, storied career, which has found him throwing down with everyone from Bill Frisell to Lou Reed to Cibo Matto to Antony & The Johnsons. For *WA-Zoh* – the latest in a frustratingly small pile of solo releases – Wieselman improvises alongside manipulated field recordings of birds. The natural becomes achingly, unnervingly sublime, even ethereal: "Pt Reyes" twisting twitters and trills into mild tonal rounds of *Space Invaders* and *Pong*; "Fourvière" a compositional glen of clarinets and wild butterflies; the cosmic piano spackled "Luxembourg 2" faintly redolent of traditional holiday standard "The Holly And The Ivy".

Size Matters by Byron Coley

Andrew DR Abbott
Live From Clover Hill
Sonido Polifonica 10"
The latest 10" from this Yorkshire guitarist has been out for a bit, but I just stumbled across its lovely patterns. Abbott has been active in a variety of genres, but here he is playing in a very upful American Primitive style on an eight-string baritone guitar. The first side-long track "Calderfornia" is very much in the bustling style John Fahey explored in his pre-Epstein-Barr days – complex, lovely and segmented. The second side is quite different. "Cat Steps To Clover Hill" has a percussive feel akin to hobo-era work by Harry Partch. "Drone For Skircoat Moor" uses a melodica and bowed strings for a saw-buzz worthy of Pelt. Nicely packed with physical goodies as well. Great stuff.

Yara Asmar
home recordings 2018–2021
Hive Mind MC
Debut release by a young Lebanese puppeteer/video artist/musician using a variety of toy instruments, homemade percussion and her grandmother's accordion. Some field recordings get used as well, and the results have a quality you might well associate with the thrum of a nursery in outer space. The sonic qualities of the toy instruments are captured in a straight-ahead manner, although they wander into quadrants that are as fried as anything done by My Cat Is An Alien. The combination and contrast of highly familiar and highly alien elements gives Asmar's music a quality not quite like anything else I can name. The way she channels found voices into her surreal mix of sounds is particularly striking.

Binary Marketing Show
Somehow We'll Grow Into Some Overlapping Oak
Antiquated Future MC
Although this is the first one I've seen, this is the tenth volume in Antiquated Future's 'selected songs' series, which compiles work by artists the label feels have been unjustly overlooked. The Binary Marketing Show duo started in Brooklyn then moved to the Pacific Northwest. These tracks were recorded between 2007–22, using voices, synths, guitar, toys and whatever else popped into their hands. The tunes are strange but poppy with a wobbly centre that sometimes makes me think of a hybrid between two New England bands – Blanche Blanche Blanche and Big Blood. A lotta Bs there, but don't fret. I also hear traces of Yo La Tengo in their New Zealand tribute mode, but don't quote me. The more of this I hear, the less it conforms to easy description. The programming is not chronological, but BMS seem like one of those combos whose conception was fully formed from the start, so their musical evolution is a-linear. Not sure how I missed them for the last decade and a half, but it's time to play catch up.

Bone & Joint Center
Be Healed
Ramshackle Party Brothers MC
Albany, New York's Jackson Wingate has been making freaky music for a long time now. He had a crazy improv duo called ERL back in the 1980s (when he also ran a label of the same name), then had a solo cello project called Ziamaluch after he started Flipped Out Records. I may have hosted the sole live Ziamaluch show when I got him to open for Universal Indians back in the day. After that he was the ringleader of the monstrous psych-sloth guitar ensemble known as Burnt Hills, whose shows and records were all epic smoke fests. He formed Bone & Joint Center – a guitar/xylophone duo with his wife Sick Llana – in the same time period, and this one-sided tape is their second release of the pandemic era. Sounds like Wingate's either playing bass or has discovered the low notes on his guitar, while Sick Llana beats her xylophone like Maureen Tucker. In terms of form, this is a destroyed mess of full-bore stonerism.

Ddrome
power city
Cruel Nature MC
This is the second tape by Ddrome, a drum plus drone solo project invented by Dublin musician Jamie Davis during the pandemic. Davis is known for his work with the improv trio Zeropunkt, but the sounds here are much less frantic. The bits I've heard of the earlier tape mix drums and electronics in equal measure, but power is more focused on the latter. Drums are a constant presence, but they now provide accompaniment to the washes of synthesized sound more than anything else. The main events are keyboardly – slow notes are plunked and set amid what sound like recordings of star clusters. Admittedly, there is evidence aplenty that drums are also present, but their use is about punctuation, not dissertation.

Delphine Dora
In Illo Tempore
Sloow Tapes MC
The new tape by this wonderful French musician is titled *At That Time* in Latin. It was recorded in a Swiss church using organ and voice, so maybe that's where the Latin comes in. None of the vocals sound very mass-like, but it has been a long damn time since I entered a church willingly, so maybe the rituals have evolved. Despite my loathing for churches, I have always loved the sound of church organ, and this one is no exception. Delphine Dora plays in a way that is fluid, but shares its pacing with liturgical music. Her wordless vocals follow or contrast with the melodies, and there is a repeating sort of trash compactor percussion (of unknown origin) in the mix.

Post Moves
Clarity Surrender
Sweet Wreath MC
Upstate New York based musician Sam Wenc records under the name Post Moves. Using a variety of stringed instruments, electronic treatments, voice and Yod only knows what else, Wenc's music (which is new to me, although he has a very interesting looking discography) combines elements of folk music with the avant garde. This trope is not uncommon, but Wenc's guitar playing takes a complex approach to contemporary acoustic primitive/art techniques. And much of his work would sound right at home on a bill with Daniel Bachman, among others. But the additional elements that pop into the music – treated vocals, percussion and whatnot – have a definite experimental flavour.

Thresher
Homunculus
Own Sound MC
A new project by Kevin Griffin of British Columbia unit Psychedelic Dirt. The music is created with guitars, harmonica, tape loops and field recordings. It's improv oriented with the sound's texture being more of a focus than any sort of song form, but it has a great tripped out vibe that is equal parts psych and noise rock. Certain passages make me think of my favourite moments of live Grateful Dead tapes from 1968, where everything starts to crack up near the end of extended jams. Edited down from two dozen sessions, the meaty quiver to Thresher's sound truly makes me wish I still drank acid-laced apple wine.

Send cassettes, 7"s, 10"s, etc for possible inclusion in Size Matters to: Byron Coley, PO Box 627, Northampton, MA 01062, US

The Boomerang

New reissues and archive releases

Enhet För Fri Musik
Inom Dig, Inom Mig
Aguirre DL/LP

Gothenburg based experimental jazz folksters Enhet För Fri Musik (Hugo Randulv, Gustaf Dicksson, Sofie Herner, Dan Johansson and Mattias Andersson) reissue their limited 2017 album *Inom Dig, Inom Mig*, which first appeared on cassette in 2015. Enhet rekindle a sense of the communal in Swedish folk traditions. There's a fondness for old technology, the band employing a reel-to-reel machine while field recordings, both mechanical and sourced from nature, provide constant background noise.

"Droppar På Din Hud" features detuned guitar cycling around simple repetitive riffs, sounding at times like the rusty banjo of a bluesman from the US deep south. Dicksson's organ on "Stilla Vatten" has a lullaby feel to it, meandering melodically around the keyboard in no particular key or tune. Herner's haunting vocals swing between lazy, drunken wailing and the plaintive innocence of a child left out on the naughty step.

On "Se Dig Om" there's an unsettling indifferent lonesomeness to her voice, as if she's the last person left on the island in Alejandro Amenábar's 2001 film *The Others*, while Johansson adds a ghostly feel with his recordings of birdsong, people moving around, squeaks, inexplicable draggings of something heavy across the floor. Dicksson's long, raw saxophone solo gives the impression of struggling to hold the notes and remember the tune.

The album's beguiling sound recalls children playing their instruments with raw clumsy enthusiasm, yet with the deeper engagement of serious, accomplished musicians. Allegedly this project started out as a free improvised jazz set, but the group allowed themselves the freedom to let the music evolve for itself, resulting in this glorious example of abstract folk.

Jo Hutton

Milford Graves with Arthur Doyle & Hugh Glover
Children Of The Forest
Black Editions Archive DL/2xLP

The discography of paradigm shifting free jazz drummer Milford Graves is simultaneously broad, compact and porous. Beginning in the mid-1960s, he was the leader or co-leader on just 18 albums; between 1977–97, he barely recorded at all. Before his death in 2021, Graves struck a deal with Black Editions Archive to make available recordings from his personal archives. While 2022's *Historic Music Past Tense Future*, the first Black Editions release, presented Graves in the company of fellow free jazz titans Peter Brötzmann and William Parker, he leads his own ensemble on *Children Of The Forest*. Drawn from sessions with reeds players Arthur Doyle and Hugh Glover that took place in his basement during the two months before his landmark concert recording of *Bäbi*, it provides insight into that album's development.

Glover, the sessions' sole survivor, declares in an accompanying interview that he and Doyle needed time to grasp Graves's intensions. The near absence of the drummer's pan-linguistic vocals throughout this set confirm its workshop aspect; instead of enacting a ritual for an audience, he was teaching his acolytes the ceremony. But they were not learning pieces so much as learning how to enact a process and developing the stamina necessary to sustain its combustion. On the earliest tracks from 24 January, while Doyle and Glover play their saxophones with oxen-goring intensity, they sound like they're chasing after Graves's percussion barrage. Solo track "February 2 1976 I" reveals just how daunting their task was. His polyrhythms sound like the work of several players, and there's just not much room for anyone else.

The 11 March session differs in sound, but the trio have found the necessary cohesion. Doyle quickly finds his place, situating gravelly tenor cries in the centre of Graves's constantly morphing assault. Glover digs even deeper into the rhythms, setting aside his reeds to cough out cadences with a klaxon while Doyle switches to a fife. Regardless of instrumentation, they sound like one hydra-headed, octopus armed beast. Cohesive at last, they recorded *Bäbi* nine days later.

Bill Meyer

Juju
A Message From Mozambique
Strut DL/LP

This is the first reissue of Juju's debut album, recorded in 1973 for Brooklyn, New York independent label Strata-East. Saxophonist Plunky Branch – aka Plunky Nkabinde – formed Ndikho & The Natives with his musical mentor, Zulu musician Ndikho Xaba. Three Natives members – Branch, Ken Shabala (bass) and Lon Moshe (vibes, flute) – joined Marvin X's theatrical production *The Resurrection Of The Dead*, with Bay Area musicians Al-Hammel Rasul on keyboards, and percussionists Babatunde Lea and Jalango Ngoma.

When the production ended, the musicians formed Juju and gigged in the Bay Area. This was the Vietnam era, but Juju were inspired by anti-colonial struggles in South Africa, Angola and Mozambique – hence the album's title. Plunky describes it as "one of the earliest examples of African rhythms being fused with free cosmic jazz to make an international political statement". At this time, the Soledad Brothers and Angela Davis were prominent in the US, and Juju's music matched their fiery activism.

A major influence is John Coltrane. The most impressive track "(Struggle) Home" is a long essay in ecstatic free jazz, its anthemic opening recalling *A Love Supreme*. "Soledad Brothers" is a lyrical, plangent tribute featuring piano and vibraphone. "Make Your Own Revolution Now", the fieriest track in terms of style and aspiration, has a lot of screaming, both instrumentally and vocally. The hypnotic "Nairobi/Chants" is percussion-driven, with whistles and little instruments.

A useful comparison is Idris Ackamoor & The Pyramids, who developed their Afro jazz funk fusion during a long visit to Africa in 1972–73. Juju's album is an immensely enjoyable rediscovery. It's of its time, with affinities to Black consciousness music of that period, but of more enduring interest than the work of The Pyramids. A historic and moving reissue.

Andy Hamilton

Roland Kayn
Rathan
Reiger-Records-Reeks DL
Yellowings Conglomerations
Reiger-Records-Reeks DL
Otron
Reiger-Records-Reeks DL

Electronic composer Roland Kayn's catalogue is mysterious and opaque, which is part of its allure. Since his death in 2011, his estate has been unspooling recordings from his archive that expand upon the experiments of previous decades at the Institute of Sonology in the Netherlands, where Jaap Vink crafted innovative patching systems from heavyweight filters and modulators. These three newly released compositions are all from the early 2000s, when Kayn was enmeshed in his Reiger home studio creating neverending compositions using his own sound archive as a starting point, with a spectrum of music running from gossamer thin tone webs to cosmic evocations of burning galaxies.

Kayn left behind little information about these later period compositions beyond their titles, which allows the listener's imagination to run riot. *Rathan* is tremulous, spacious and fragile, with discerning use of tape edits and reverb. Early on in the piece, you hear audio tape being sped up and slowed down, a rare moment of physical presence surfacing through an ingenious network of delays, filters and ring modulation effects. The textures evolve slowly and harmoniously, creating a finely balanced but fragile sense of calm. The two-part *Otron* explores similar zones with a more palpable sense of controlled chaos, its feedback processes on the verge of going haywire. These are atmospheric pieces to rival Kayn's own *Transit* and *Impactions*.

Yellowings Conglomeration in contrast kicks off with serious bass weight, slow motion collisions and a sense of the fabric of space warping around you. There are hints of melody and perhaps orchestras and pianos

Glasgow's Scatter Archive imprint is rewriting the narrative of music in Scotland

By Stewart Smith

Toshimaru Nakamura
Live At Consume
Scatter Archive DL
Joel Stern
Glasgow 2001
Scatter Archive DL
Julien Ottavi
Consume
Scatter Archive DL
Anna Homler & Richard Sanderson
Glasgow Toy Bazaar
Scatter Archive DL

In its initial mid-1990s run, Liam Stefani's Scatter label issued eight albums, including celebrated sides by Derek Bailey, Steve Beresford, Lol Coxhill and Pat Thomas. By the end of the decade, Stefani had turned his attention to concert promotion, filling a gap for improvised and experimental music in Glasgow's music scene by bringing the likes of Lol Coxhill, Jackie O Motherfucker and Vibracathedral Orchestra to the 13th Note Cafe. The bills were often shared with local artists including Richard Youngs, Brian Lavelle and Caroline McKenzie.

For years, Stefani's recordings of these gigs sat on the shelf, until the Covid-19 lockdown gave him the opportunity to start sharing them with the world. Since then, the project has only gained momentum, with digital releases from the archives of Stefani and other musicians dropping almost every other week. Last year, he pulled off a major coup with the release of Derek Bailey's legendary practice tapes *Domestic Jungle*. The label has also started commissioning new works, establishing itself as a living archive.

Recent archival releases place a spotlight on Consume, a Glasgow based experimental music label and night run by Murray Johnston between 2000–05. These live recordings from 2001 provide a vivid impression of the noises rumbling from the 13th Note basement.

Live At Consume documents one of no-input mixer pioneer Toshimaru Nakamura's earliest UK shows. The 20 minute set opens with a bright bell-like tone that's cut sharply, leaving a delicate ribbon of decay. From there, we move into classic onkyo territory, as stretches of silence are disrupted by pops and bursts of static. From the threshold of audibility, a needling sinewave emerges. Nakamura slowly brings it into focus, filling out the frequencies and carefully drawing streaks of distortion across the canvas. With masterful control, he sculpts those frequencies into a chorus of high fluttering tones over a percussive churn of muffled distortion. As we reach peak density, Nakamura rips through it all with wild swoops of feedback, working the knobs with the relish of a big band saxophonist taking a long awaited solo. To have heard this in the room at the time must have been something else. Two decades on, it's a succinct and potent example of Nakamura's art.

Joel Stern's set comes from a shared bill with Mattin and Rosy Parlane, with whom he was sharing a house in London at the time. In Stern's notes to the album, the Australian recalls his set-up being two MiniDisc recorders filled with field recordings. Each recorder was fitted with a pair of binaural microphones plugged into the input. While one MiniDisc was playing, the other was in record mode, allowing Stern to gradually feed the room sound back out through the PA. By moving the microphones around the room, he creates further layers of sound. The opening minutes find him constructing a cycle of harmonic feedback and billowing distortion. It gathers density and momentum, as the recording MiniDisc swallows the room sound. Stern pulls things back to reveal the percussive clicks of the objects he plays live. As woodwinds toot over the creak and twang of an egg slicer, a tornado of feedback rises, laying waste to all around it.

As Julien Ottavi recalls in his album's notes, his plan for the 13th Note was to play minimal mouth sounds – "squeaky wet borborygmes manipulated live with my laptop". Yet the dry air in the room meant he couldn't produce the necessary saliva. Instead, he launches into guttural drones and burbling, initially reminiscent of Henri Chopin, before getting into seriously gnarly extended groans. Pained inhalations and lip-puckering explosions merge into cloudy electronics and stuttering static. It builds to a climax of ecstatic ferocity, followed by a coda of cracked muttering and gauzy fidgeting. Switching to pure electronics, Ottavi lays down slow swelling tones, gradually speeding up the oscillations and adding layers of feedback, panning across the stereo field. The closing "Craquelure" transforms a ringing oscillator tone into a symphony of sonic images: phantom choirboys, acid baths, prowling synth bass, burning embers. It's a reminder of how exciting early laptop composition could be.

British improvisor Richard Sanderson's duo with California sound and performance artist Anna Homler on Glasgow Toy Bazaar is reminiscent of their trio with Steve Beresford, but with an identity of its own. Sanderson plays a series of synth, guitar and percussion loops from a Zoom sampler, providing a steady foundation for Homler's stories and songs. Fragmented folk songs in an invented language are alternated with wide-eyed tales of alien visitations. Homler weaves the sounds of her toys and objects between vocal passages, with Sanderson adding reflective post-punk melodica and rousing bursts of electronics.

Scatter Archive's documentation of the 13th Note's adventurous programming not only shows the various directions improvised music was moving in around the millennium; it also rewrites the narrative of music in Scotland. While they're too modest to take credit, Stefani and Johnston helped lay the groundwork for the outward-looking experimental scene that flourished in the 2000s with festivals like Le Weekend, Free RadiCCAls and Instal. The future starts here. ○

Scattered dreams: Joel Stern

Glenn Schenau

somewhere deep in the mix. In parts, it's a return to the monumental power of the 2017 set *A Little Electronic Milky Way Of Sound*. The impenetrable logic and overwhelming scale makes it an intimidating experience.

Kayn's late work can be interpreted as a dub master using tapes, edits and effects to create musical gold from sonic base elements. Perhaps another comparison might be the unstable opus of Nurse With Wound, where existing works are endlessly tinkered with by obscure hands. But the end result is a catalogue whose depth and range are unusual even in electronic and electroacoustic music.

Derek Walmsley

Angus MacLise
Tapes
Art Into Life 3xCD/DL

Angus MacLise, The Velvet Underground's first drummer, was notorious for his timekeeping. Not at the kit – he just couldn't ever get to a gig at the allotted hour. Equally resistant to orthodox drum styles, MacLise was in excelsis the different drummer that the counterculture was supposed to be marching to.

Dead at 41, MacLise's reputation is almost entirely posthumous, reinforced by occasional retrievals from the archive that Hetty MacLise left to Yale University. Jim O'Rourke took charge of the sound restoration and mastering of the various sources that make up *Tapes*, a further snatch of the 100 or so hours of material that is MacLise's acoustic legacy. Some day, it will all be put together alongside his writings and some kind of picture assembled. For the moment, these are torsos, found items and sketches. They include recordings of Buddhist monks, shortwave scribbles, more organised sessions with Tony Conrad and the neognostic William Breeze and, perhaps most interesting of all, music from *The Invasion Of Thunderbolt Pagoda*, material from which came out just before the turn of the millennium on Quakebasket/Siltbreeze. The present set is a reissue of cassettes made in a tiny run by Pleasure Editions about eight years ago, hailed as the gnostic gospels of late 1960s psychedelia.

The VU connection goes through John Cale and Tony Conrad rather than Lou Reed and Maureen Tucker, who replaced him in the group. There are clear links forward too, to the work of Current 93, Coil and Psychic TV (with whom Breeze collaborated on viola, an instrument whose signature insufficencies are characteristic of this field of magickal research) but one senses, via the little bursts of verité, that Angus and Hetty MacLise were probably more significant as catalysts and reagents rather than as works-directed artists. MacLise was a mindset rather than a creator, but more orderly than his fragmented legacy and reputation suggest.

Brian Morton

Suburban Annihilation: The California Hardcore Explosion From The City To The Beach 1978–1983
Various
Futurismo CD/DL/2xLP

When punk rock boomed across the UK in the 1970s, many cited the initial spark as a reaction to the drab pointlessness of a Dickensian urban existence and the prospect of becoming factory fodder for a more fortunate class. In America, the reaction from teenaged Californians enamoured with the wild looks and sounds emanating from across the Atlantic was to adapt that rage to fit their own environment. Theirs was a rebellion against an overabundance of opportunities – a rejection of the American dream set to a supersonic beat.

As much as the concept of teen rage in the land of surf and sand made the middle-aged mainstream rock critics of the time chuckle, bands like The Adolescents and TSOL struck a nerve with an underground demographic of disaffected youth. From that, American hardcore punk was spawned. With a tracklist co-curated by Henry Rollins, *Suburban Annihilation* collects the initial bands that defined California as the birthplace of the genre – barring his own Black Flag, curiously enough.

Argued by many to be the first California hardcore record, 1978's *Out Of Vogue* EP by Santa Ana's Middle Class is represented by its title track. Although it certainly ticks all the boxes of being loud, fast and abruptly short, there's something about the way vocalist Jeff Atta rattles off the lyrics like an unenthused auctioneer that makes it off-kilter and geeky compared to the brute force sounds that succeeded the group.

Blunt anthems like Wasted Youth's "Fuck Authority" and Circle Jerks' "Live Fast Die Young" are more emblematic of the angsty blueprint that echoed throughout the state and eventually the world, while Red Kross's snotty, hook-laden "Burnout" and Flipper's lumbering "Ha Ha Ha" show the pushback to hardcore's rapidly written rulebook. An unexpected though welcome surprise among the 25 songs is "OC Life" , a driving anthem railling against beach banality from Adolescents guitarist Rikk Agnew's 1982 solo album *All By Myself*, a very underrated and very peculiar record.

Like any geek, I find there to be a lot of necessary bands missing from *Suburban Annihilation*. But as a basic round-up of the early days of California hardcore, it's solid.

Tony Rettman

Suicide
A Way Of Life
Mute/BMG CD/DL/LP
Alan Vega
Live At Rockpalast 1982
Play Loud! DL/LP+DVD

The mythology that has swirled around Suicide for decades tends towards the blood and thunder stuff – the shock of their two-man electronic chunter inducing riots in nascent punk crowds, and so forth. This 35th anniversary reissue of the third studio album comes with a milder anecdote. Martin Rev claims the whole thing was essentially written and recorded during their first morning in the studio, to the surprise of producer Ric Ocasek on arrival. With both Ocasek and Rev's bandmate Alan Vega no longer with us, best to enjoy this tale as a garnish to a fine album.

A Way Of Life teems with fine production touches, like the crisp, proto-techno synth line on "Sufferin' In Vain" and "Wild In Blue", which throbs with a greater depth than anything they'd previously done. "Devastation" recalls ostensibly post-Suicide acts like DAF, making this LP's original US release on Wax Trax! more fitting, and "Surrender" is a gloriously ersatz crooner with a saccharine female backing chorus – 1950s style radio schmaltz reimagined with Suicide's trademark sequenced wobble.

Notable among a few bonus tracks is a 1988 live take on Bruce Springsteen's "Born In The USA". *"I'll fuck it up, don't worry"*, Vega assures a fan, and what transpires is more an opportunity for the vocalist to run through his provincial club singer-style impersonations of various rock icons than anything else. This brings us to *Live At Rockpalast 1982*, a recording of a show by Vega and his band for German public TV. Here, Gene Vincent's "Be Bop A Lula" gets the Vega treatment. He might have released it as a single the previous year, but it's genuinely unclear if this is actually supposed to be a cover.

"Jukebox Baby", which was reprised for *A Way Of Life*, is in the lineage of Bo Diddley here, with an ad-libbed namecheck for "96 Tears" and an eight minute running time tacking back towards the established Suicide sound. This is atypical in the set: "Magdalena", "Goodbye Darling" and others are rendered frantic and crude garage blues, with drums that sound on the verge of implosion and yowling slide guitar.

Noel Gardner

Uboa
The Origin Of My Depression
The Flenser DL/LP

Chimes ring out among harsh noise. Reedy vocals and echoing piano follow. Australian noise musician Uboa confirms the impression she's anxious about time on "Misspent Youth" where she grieves a part of herself she feels never existed – transitioning, as she perceives it, too late. She kisses a cisgendered woman and *"taste[s] the girlhood I never had"*.

The Flenser is now reissuing Uboa's 2019 album *The Origin Of My Depression* on vinyl, sealing her transgender grief and personal trauma onto wax for the first time. The album admits the listener into such an intensely private place that even before the harsh noise kicks in, it's already a harrowing listen. Uboa herself has said that, due to the state in which she recorded her vocals, she no longer knows what all the lyrics mean.

Origin takes us through moments of quiet on "Epilation Joy", with its plucked strings and soft guitar flurries, which even in their acoustic state seem dangerous, teetering on the edge of a great chasm into which the melodies *Origin* takes us through moments of quiet on "Epilation Joy", with its plucked strings and soft guitar flurries, which even in their acoustic state seem dangerous, teetering on the edge of a great chasm into which the melodies constantly threaten to tip. The swarm of noise that follows feels almost comforting.

Several years on, it seems Uboa has found both trust and time, sharing her music with a wider audience, performing live regularly and preparing to release new music as well as revisiting the old. Time may have helped Uboa to begin the healing process.

Rosie Esther Solomon

The discography of UK psych soul dissident Lewis Taylor finally gets its due

By Jon Dale

Lost and found: Lewis Taylor

Lewis Taylor
The Lost Album
Be With DL/2xLP
Lewis II
Be With DL/2xLP
The Damn Rest
Be With DL/LP
Stoned Part I
Be With DL/2xLP
Stoned Part II
Be With DL/2xLP

In the mid-1980s, well before he became the great hope of UK neo-soul with his self-titled debut album, vocalist, songwriter and multi-instrumentalist Lewis Taylor appeared on *Beyond The Wildwood*, a tribute album to Syd Barrett. Nestling among contributions from the likes of Opal and Television Personalities was a version of "Wolfpack" by The Lobster Quadrille, a one-off trio led by Taylor, then trading under the alias Sheriff Jack.

This connection with Barrett is surprisingly instructive. In a 2016 interview, Taylor acknowledged that leftfield music from the 70s, such as Barrett, Faust and Cecil Taylor, first caught his ear. The connection with British psychedelia and progressive rock is particularly significant, given his sometime membership of The Edgar Broughton Band. It also seems, in some lopsided way, to have informed his music over ensuing decades. The muffled, slurred textures of 1996's *Lewis Taylor* were as redolent of the sensory smear of psychedelia as they were of the triphop and avant R&B of their time.

The story of Taylor's artistic compulsions is often reduced to an index of unrealised potential, as though he needed to follow through on the opportunities offered in the wake of his debut – working with D'Angelo, for example – to make his name. These reissues, courtesy of archival label Be With, detail a far more compelling narrative, one of exploratory gumption and creative determination, almost to the point of perversity. Collectively, they constitute an object lesson in following one's own illogic.

The Lost Album was written and recorded in the slipstream of Taylor's debut. On this collection, he strays markedly from the sound that set out his stall. It's a strange, voluptuous prog pop opus, full of 70s FM radio harmonies, MOR country, Todd Rundgren-esque vamps (see the joyous "Leader Of The Band") and Beach Boys knock-offs ("Let's Hope Nobody Finds Us"). With his longtime collaborator Sabina Smyth fully involved, the songs are layered and stacked with intricacies and intimacies, full of little pockets of curiosity. It's a masterpiece.

Taylor is rightly proud of *The Lost Album*, saying, "unlike the others, there isn't anything about it that embarrasses me". It's tempting to wonder how his music might be understood differently if it had been released by Island Records. Instead, Taylor recorded another album, *Lewis II*, as a follow-up to his debut. Smyth isn't much of a presence here, which might be why it's slightly unconvincing – Taylor's playing and singing is, as always, a joy, and the songs are never less than good, but the album never quite transcends its component parts. The exception is "Satisfied", a liquid enchantment that spins around an eternal chord sequence, a gaseous yet limpid R&B ballad.

Perhaps the best material from Taylor's Island era, though, appears on *The Damn Rest*. A set of B sides from the singles culled from his debut, it's Taylor at his most uncensored and exploratory, his guard fully down. If the murk and marrow of his debut hinted at unconscious undercurrents, turbulence rumbling under the music's surface, *The Damn Rest* is open and psychedelic, a collection of woozy driftworks. It's breathtaking stuff – the leery shuffle of "Asleep When You Come" is submerged under layers of silt and gravel; "I Dream The Better Dream" sets Taylor's voice adrift on ambient float; "Pie In The Electric Sky/If I Lay Down With You" is lovesexy incarnate, a fusion of the religious, the carnal and the surreal.

Throughout *The Damn Rest* the music feels as though it's trying to violate its own limits, which is precisely where Taylor excels. There's a little less of that in the two volumes of *Stoned*, the albums he self-released after he drifted away from the major label system. *Part I*, from 2002, has Taylor in control of his muse, though informed by Smyth's significant contributions. The soul pop songs like "Stoned Part I" and "Send Me An Angel" are lush, genre-reverent without being slavish in their dedication, but it's the strung-out ballads that excel: "When Will I Ever Learn Part I" and "From The Day We Met Part II", shadow lovers in song, take the hermetic intimacy of Shuggie Otis's 1974 album *Inspiration Information* into another orbit, with Taylor's voice sunblind and dazed.

Some of these songs reappear in reworked form on 2004's *Stoned Part II* – an album framed as Taylor's rapprochement with dance pop. There are flickers of filter disco and French touch, junglist interjections and some of Taylor's most unabashedly pop moments, such as the 80s soul strut of "Reconsider". "Won't Fade Away" echoes the worship of Californian sunshine pop that's writ through *The Lost Album*; the following "Keep On Keeping On" closes the album with a web of queasy synths and descending vocal harmonies, before a fearsome, gravity defying guitar solo stretches across thunderous drums.

Stoned Part II is one of Taylor's most quixotic albums, which is no small statement, given that he's designed a non-career out of compulsive left turns. Looking back to the musical climate of the 90s and early 2000s, very few were quite so ambitious, so vertiginous, in their demands on pop music, and their vision of the shapes it could take. ○

Paul Rider

Print Run

New music books and publications

ESG's Come Away With ESG
Cheri Percy
Bloomsbury 33 1/3 Pbk 144 pp

Hugely informative, but crucially, gratifyingly angry. Any book about ESG, the band formed in the South Bronx by the Scroggins sisters in 1978, whose music would go on to influence a welter of pivotal records in multiple genres, that wasn't in some way both furious about how criminally unheralded they were at their zenith, and deeply questioning of how successive waves of rock history have kept them marginalised, really wouldn't be worth its salt.

Cheri Percy's illuminating text, based on research as well as new interviews with ESG founder Renee Scroggins, not only delineates their fascinating story while tracing the myriad ways in which ESG's dissident, unique sound has inspired so many other similarly side-lined artists, it also crucially retains a pleasing sense of rage and rancour about that ongoing marginalisation. As Cheri Percy puts it, "Music criticism needs to provide a platform to amplify voices that differ from the norm." This is dazzling history with a sense of purpose.

Her introduction spells out both her narrative animus and the research roadblocks she hit in compiling her narrative – a mix of understandable wariness from a band so badly burned by the industry, and a righteous sense of tearing the story away from those mainstream voices who merely see ESG as a footnote. It's important for Percy not just to find people who were there, but also those who chased the secret of ESG long after they had slipped into obscurity. Opening chapter "The South Bronx Story" neatly punctures hiphop's reductive mythos about the birthplace of rap to emphasise the musical diversity in the area that fed directly into ESG's faltering first steps, before painting a wonderfully half-accidental narrative around how, encouraged always by their mom, the Scroggins sisters took their unique sound to Manhattan and the no wave scene, impacting heavily on the sounds of emergent hiphop and house music. "From Downtown Manhattan To North Manchester" contextualises the connections forged between these working class Black girls from the Bronx and the burgeoning post-punk Manchester scene of Tony Wilson and Martin Hannett, with writer Vivien Goldman providing real insight into the output and roster of 99 Records. Perhaps the most fascinating chapter for this hiphop fan, "Sampling Credits Don't Pay Our Bills" calls hiphop to account for its larcenous thieving of ESG's beats and textures while pointing out the band's huge discomfort with having their innovations utilised in frequently misogynistic and violent music. A quote from Renee, "I would go to different clubs and hear "UFO" in the background on different records and think someone was stealing from me", made me wince with guilt. The book concludes with perhaps its most suggestive chapter, "40 Years Of Dancing", which posits those intriguing ways in which ESG's music has persisted and mutated as an underground touchstone for artists like Karen O and Las Kellies since the turn of the millennium.

Percy is a great storyteller and interviewer, but perhaps more importantly, she links the specifics of ESG's story to a persuasive wider point about how women's ongoing writing out from rock's history needs to be resisted every chance we get. *Come Away With ESG* never feels overly polemical, but consider this a shot across those white patriarchal bows.

Neil Kulkarni

Alien Territory: Radical, Experimental & Irrelevant Music in 1970s San Diego
Bill Perrine
Termite House Pbk 264 pp

San Diego is the second largest city in California, but its cultural influence has never come close to that of Los Angeles or San Francisco. Partly because of the large military presence there, the city's reputation is as a very conservative enclave. Bill Perrine has directed a few documentaries attempting to counter this opinion, but *Alien Territory* is his first book, and details the experimental music scene that grew up around the music department at the University of California San Diego.

Alien Territory's central figure is Harry Partch, although his association with the school was brief and not all that smooth. The book opens in 1964, when Partch left his studio in Petaluma and relocated to San Diego with vague promises that UCSD would both house his collection of instruments, and also offer him a pay cheque when they got their music campus up and running. It didn't really work out, but Partch taught there briefly and many of the players in his later ensembles were drawn from UCSD's ranks.

Most of the text revolves around composers associated with the school for longer periods, like Pauline Oliveros, Kenneth Gaburo and Robert Erickson, plus musicians like Bertram Turetsky. Other action comes from students such as Diamanda Galás, Paul Dresher and Peter Gordon.

The school had an idyllic avant-hippy feel in its early days, with separate studios for Buchla and Moog synth systems, and lots of inspired musical and theatrical freakery. Sounds like it was a fun damn place, full of extremely weird music/perfomance/whatsis. For most of the book, Perrine provides an exciting historical narrative of the times, mixed with anecdotes detailing the grind of UCSD's academic politics.

Other chapters deal with local weirdos, only some of whom were associated with the school. Topics include the work of noise pioneer Boyd Rice (plus collaborators Robert Turman and Steve Hitchcock), new age multi-tasker Master Wilburn Burchette, and wild vocalist Diamanda Galás (along with bassist Mark Dresser and various free jazzers). Some of the more amazing sounding projects, such as David Dunn's ensemble Fatty Acid, have left very little in the way of graspable evidence, but Perrine's descriptions of the music are mouth-watering. And his lengthy reviews of available recordings are quite revelatory. Although I own many of the records he writes about, I had very little sense of their history before reading this book.

To be able to locate obscure but fascinating LPs by artists like Dary John Mizelle and Prima Materia in their actual context is great. And the information about mysterious saxophonist Jim French (an early Galás collaborator) is wonderful, as is the cover photo of French looking like he's an alien visiting the Cabaret Voltaire.

Alien Territory is fairly dense and has plenty of footnotes, but Perrine's writing is clear, concise and not nearly as dry as it might be. A good number of the artists about whom he writes are not well known, but I found myself pulling out records and tracking down music with which I had only passing familiarity. And most of it was exceedingly fine. Any music book that can actively turn you on to new sounds is a success, and Perrine has done just that with *Alien Territory*.

Byron Coley

Come My Fanatics: A Journey Into The World Of Electric Wizard
Dan Franklin
White Rabbit Hbk 352 pp

Electric Wizard are no strangers to headlining metal festivals. Their records are considered classics of the doom genre. They've birthed countless imitators. Black T-shirt sales must tick over nicely. Still, they remain something of a cult act, around whom mystery remains.

Dan Franklin clears things up as best as can be done when so much pot smoke surrounds the subject. The book's early pages, where guitarist/singer Jus Oborn guides Franklin through his hometown of Wimborne, hint at an ensuing gonzo road trip. That doesn't transpire, relieving author, subject and readers' psyches alike. Most of the biography's direct quotes come from thorough research and past interviews, including those previously conducted by Franklin himself.

Oborn escaped a town that's painted as both uniquely odd and symbolic of England's brutally conservative underbelly. He was raised in the 1970s, which Franklin calls "the golden age of institutional abuse". Having lived to tell the tale, Oborn also seems reluctant to leave the past despite all his successes in pushing doom forwards. Electric

Author Cathi Unsworth in Kensal Green Cemetery, London, 1988

Cathi Unsworth's social and political history of goth sets the macabre movement against the true horrors of the Thatcher years

By Claire Biddles

Season Of The Witch: The Book Of Goth
Cathi Unsworth
Nine Eight Pbk 480 pp

A cross between social history and Dickensian epic, S*eason Of The Witch* begins provocatively, in the political and musical Year Zero of 1979. "The PM and the most enduring icon of Gothic music had one major thing in common," journalist and author Cathi Unsworth suggests, comparing Margaret Thatcher to Siouxsie Sioux. "They had both been inspired into their roles – conjured into being, you might say." With this sustained sense of mystic inevitability, Unsworth draws deft parallels between the late 20th century political landscape and the resulting goth iconoclasts who "conjured poltergeists and werewolves from Britain's troubled national psyche".

Using Thatcher's reign as her timespan, Unsworth begins her goth history with four late 1970s titans – Joy Division, Magazine, Siouxsie & The Banshees and The Cure – hurtling forwards to take in everyone from Theatre Of Hate to Blixa Bargeld to This Mortal Coil. Goth 'godparents' including Vampira, Aleister Crowley, Maria Callas and Mary Shelley are woven in thoughtfully via short profiles. The writing is information-heavy but hugely pacy and entertaining, with a wide reach that ensures that goth – and, by extension, the social movements it co-existed with – is portrayed as a sprawling nervous system, rather than a falsely united movement.

Crime novelist Unsworth has a storyteller's sense of drama and mysticism, especially when making links between characters and places. Legendary nightclub The Batcave benefits from its position "on a powerful Soho leyline", and London West Hampstead's Moonlight Club – site of late Joy Division gigs, and where The Birthday Party played before recording their first album – "[acts] like a portal in our story... pointing Ian Curtis towards the exit, while summoning Nick Cave forwards".

There's a strong sense of narrative movement. The Yorkshire Ripper looms large, especially in a chapter on the Leeds of Soft Cell and Sisters Of Mercy, until captured in the grooves of The Banshees' *Juju*. The grimness of Thatcher's 1983 re-election prompts both a wave of militarist anarcho-punk (UK Subs, New Model Army) and the "magical parallel universe" of Echo & The Bunnymen's *Ocean Rain*. Mid-80s malaise coincides with The Cure and The Cult indulging in 60s psychedelia, leading to goth going mainstream ("the implied crimes were not putting in enough hours on the graveyard shift with John Peel"). Marc Almond's *Mother Fist* and Diamanda Galás bring Aids and Section 28 into the story.

Bands emerge from various modes of gothic existence. Soft Cell originate from the British seaside's "ever-present threat of violence and nausea", and The Birthday Party escape the drudgery of Melbourne only to encounter Victorian-esque squalor in London: "they rummaged in skips and bins for sustenance, home furnishings and anything they could possibly sell." Many of our protagonists are the children of authority figures – police officers, teachers – suggesting a lineage of teenage rebellion, and/or a more domestically scaled version of Unsworth's central thesis.

In the middle of the book's pentagram are two figures acting as all seeing eyes and connective tissue. The first is Barry Adamson, whose prolific work with The Bad Seeds, Magazine and others, and sometimes fraught experience as a non-white musician in the scene, make his an important perspective. The second is Lydia Lunch, who despite stating that "my job is merely to shit in the face of history", made work that is rightly acknowledged as a valuable historical document of her pitch-dark times. According to Unsworth's convincing argument, this is the true meaning of goth. ○

Cathi Unsworth

Electric Wizard, 2010: (from left) Shaun Rutter, Liz Buckingham, Jus Oborn, Tas Danazoglou

Wizard remain obsessed with that decade's biker films, horror flicks, pulp fiction and comic books. Its music too, obviously, from homegrown Black Sabbath to The Stooges abroad. As with Sabbath, physical injury impacted Electric Wizard's heaviness. Having already sustained an eerily similar fingertip severance to that which necessitated Tony Iommi's string technique, Oborn perforated one eardrum on an early tour. With surgery only partially successful, excessive volume resulted. Metaphorical medical procedures arise when Oborn's wife and bandmate (since 2003) Liz Buckingham observes, "He has a bong surgically attached to his hand."

Electric Wizard are a highly visual band, in the way they dress, perform and design their retro-style artwork, but also in terms of their lyrics and sound, if that makes sense. Throughout, Franklin delves deeply into the various books, films and true-crime horrors that have informed the band's morbid vision, from the sensational to the obscure, with every Lovecraft story and video nasty contextualising the Wizardian worldview.

Illuminating as it all is, the band remain tantalisingly elusive and Franklin leaves certain debates to the internet realm. He doesn't directly tackle whether Electric Wizard are glamorising, fetishising or canonising the various literary and real-life villains who've inspired their songs. Such characters include rapists, Nazis, murderers, pornographers, puritans and misogynists from the witch-hunters of yore to mass shooters of modernity. Readers can decide for themselves where the line lies. Heavy subject matter lends itself to heavy music, after all. Perhaps imprisoning certain bastards within the verses of a metal song is the only impotent immortality they deserve.

Given his miserable adolescence, Oborn believes his life could've ended in a similar place to that of the Columbine killers whose frustrations he channelled on "We Hate You" from 2000's *Dopethrone*. Later, Buckingham compares her husband to Ricky Kasso, the teenaged satanist who stabbed his friend to death in 1984, for whom 2014's *Time To Die* acts as semi-concept album.

Rather than spiralling downwards, Oborn has dedicated his life to a project far more positive, even if that word isn't often applied to Electric Wizard's catharsis. You could say their art holds a smoke-stained mirror up to a society accountable for the creation of its own monsters. Wimborne, then, can be blamed and praised for spawning this none-heavier band. Franklin has done a tremendous job explaining why.

JR Moores

Neil Ardley: Kaleidoscopes And Rainbows
Vivien Ardley with John Coles & Dave Gelly
Jazz In Britain Hbk 417 pp

Every year or so, a journalist (and here I am, doing it) trots out CP Snow's infamous 1959 Rede lecture "The Two Cultures", in which he argued, among other things, that the British elevated the humanities to a point that denigrated and devalued hard science; and that the one "culture" tended to a tragic view of life while the other was guilty of untempered boosterism and confidence. It's cheering to be able to consider Neil Ardley as an exception and in the process to avoid the other routine trot-out: Renaissance man.

Ardley considered himself a composer first and a writer, mostly on scientific and technical topics, only as a way of putting food on the table, but it's pretty clear that his hand in the classic *The Way Things Work* and in an astonishing array of other Dorling Kindersley titles had a greater impact on British cultures than his compositions *Kaleidoscope Of Rainbows, A Symphony Of Amaranths* and *Harmony Of The Spheres*. That those jazz-influenced albums drew on relatively complex and unfamiliar ideas, such as the five-note Balinese scale on the first of those (drummer Trevor Tomkins wanted to call it *Bali Boogaloo*) was off-putting to some, but like Don Ellis and George Russell, and fellow Brits Michael Garrick, Graham Collier and Mike Westbrook, Ardley found new ways of revivifying big band language without overt recourse to swing or bop, and that achievement is still not fully acknowledged or appreciated, even nearly 20 years after Ardley's death.

His life story – relatively undramatic – is affectionately told by his partner of later years, Vivien, but with a valuable intervention by saxophonist and writer Dave Gelly, who was present during the New Jazz Orchestra period where Ardley's unique talents were first in evidence. Born in Wallington, Surrey, and then peripatetic because of the Second World War, Ardley studied chemistry at Bristol but moved to London after graduation and joined John Williams' band as pianist (he also played saxophone and, apparently, bass). NJO was his first completely creative vehicle, though, and encouraged by the visionary Denis Preston, he began to compose in earnest, combining jazz with modern compositional forms, but always with a strong emphasis on improvisation.

When *The Way Things Work* was reissued on its tenth anniversary in 1996, the obvious new element in Ardley's text and David Macaulay's pictures was digital technology. But Ardley had long since started to use synthesizers in the orchestra (somewhat in the way Messiaen – and it isn't an absurd comparison – used the ondes Martenot), and in 1991, working with John L Walters, Warren Greveson and Ian Carr, he extended his interest in electronics with Zyklus's *Virtual Realities*, which stands in even greater need of comprehensive reassessment.

Aside from all the Two Cultures and Renaissance man stuff, Ardley delightfully confounded the notion that all genius has to be tortured, or at least "difficult". His confidence in technology never overturned his ability to deal with warm bodies, with an Ellingtonian recognition that a musical idea only comes alive through players' personalities. He comes strikingly alive here, and the inclusion of two CDs, one of Zyklus and one of Ardley with Danish Radio Big Band covering the NJO classic "Le Déjeuner Sur L'Herbe" as well as "Nardis", "Surabaya Johnny" and Jack Bruce's brooding blues "The Immortal Ninth", makes Vivien's book all the more essential.

Brian Morton

Empire Roller Disco: Photographs By Patrick D Pagnano
Sara Rosen & Patrick D Pagnano
Anthology Editons Hbk 132 pp

Back in the 1970s roller skating was big in America. It was one of those recreational sports that transcended race, religion, colour and class. With the rise of disco, skating rinks across the country adapted dance music as the soundtrack to a new movement as the organists were replaced by DJs. Coming of age in Baltimore during that era, I was a high school kid who went to a spot called Skateland with my friends on Saturday night. Though I was the worst skater in the clique, taking more than a few falls, I loved seeing the joyful expressions on the faces of those soaring around the rink, blessed to be a witness to some awesome stunts others could do on four wheels that included rolling backwards and dancing funky as though they were on *Soul Train*.

Skating culture began seeping into the mainstream with songs about the rink

Ester Segarra

experience ("Bounce, Rock, Skate" by Vaughan Mason & Crew; "Hell On Wheels" by Cher) playing on the radio while very white musicals *Roller Boogie* and *Xanadu* became drive-in favourites. However, the best film about roller disco came more than two decades later with *Roll Bounce* (2005), which took place in 1978 Chicago and perfectly captured the Black skate scene and its souped-up soundtrack.

In 1980, New York photographer Patrick D Pagnano was hired to document a similar scene that was happening at Empire Rollerdrome. Located in Crown Heights, Brooklyn on Empire Boulevard, the rink first opened in 1941 and was considered one of the best in the country. Pagnano's assignment, as writer Sara Rosen explains in the excellent introductory essay in *Empire Roller Disco*, was to capture the energy of one Friday night at the venue.

While Pagnano shot for *Forbes* and *Business Week*, he was also a respected street photographer unafraid of throwing himself in the middle of the action. With a Leica M3 and a few lights set up, he went into Empire, with its "miracle maple" floor, and emerged hours later with rolls of black and white film documenting the thrills, sweat and bliss of the patrons.

However, when the magazine suddenly cancelled the commission, Pagnano put the images into his vast archives and didn't bother with them for 30-plus years. In 2018 Benrubi Gallery in New York gave him a solo show consisting of the energetic images. Though he died a few months later at the age of 71, his wife Kari worked on getting the book published.

Empire Roller Disco opens with action pics of a few hot shots, but Pagnano also captured tender moments that included a young mom showing her son how to skate, a teenage girl having a ballerina moment as her arms reach towards heaven and one afro sporting soul bro (eyes closed, fingers mid-snap, skates high) looking like the happiest man on the planet.

Empire Roller Disco is a stunning document not only of Pagnano's work, but a positive portrayal of Black community togetherness rarely seen in pop media. Whether shooting crowd scenes or intimate shots, it's obvious the skaters trusted Pagnano and his camera. A few years later disco would be dead, replaced by rap and new jack swing, but that random Friday night in February 1980 will live forever.

Michael A Gonzales

The Future Of Rock And Roll: 97X WOXY And The Fight For True Independence

Robin James

University of North Carolina Press Hbk/Pbk 190 pp

Robin James's *The Future Of Rock And Roll: 97X WOXY And The Fight For True Independence* is a paean to that Ohio based radio station, which James grew up with in the 1990s and early 2000s, as well as an analysis of the sociopolitical forces that made it increasingly difficult for WOXY to continue operating and eventually killed it. In its several incarnations, first as a terrestrial station, then an early internet based station, and lastly a social network for orphaned former listeners, WOXY massively informed James's views on music and community radio, and this, frankly, is the book's Achilles' heel. James, a philosophy professor specialising in popular music, seems so chained to memories of WOXY that she's surprisingly dismissive or unaware of alternatives to its rather limited model. (I should mention here that I've long been involved with the non-commercial station WFMU, which operates very differently.)

More surprising still, she falls into a variant of the "music/radio was great when I was a kid but sucks now" trap. WOXY was a commercial station, owned by a hip benevolent couple but nevertheless in private hands and ultimately dependent on advertisers who had to be kept happy. There were playlists handed down by management in some form, which is almost guaranteed to limit diversity in programming. And the station's fare was "modern rock", a genre that James never quite defines (significant because she repeatedly stresses its importance as a distinguishing feature of WOXY), but which included, for example, the B-52's, Pet Shop Boys, Tracy Chapman, Los Lobos, and The Clash – all well and good, but not exactly terra incognita among alternative radio stations.

James steps into a common music nostalgia trap by, for example, bemoaning the fact that indie rock eventually became "watered-down music by and for elites". Change the variables and this is an argument that people have made since the beginning of time. Yes, most likely your favourite music will eventually be co-opted, gentrified, or used in television ads that you hate. Dreadful new genres, and dreadful new radio behemoths to play them, will emerge. But there is always

Skaters at Empire Rollerdrome, Crown Heights, Brooklyn, 1980

© Patrick D Pagnano

WOXY 97X studio in Oxford, Ohio, 1985

great music being made, maybe even better than the music you grew up with, and it's not that hard to find it.

One of James's central themes – so critical that it appears in one form or another on nearly every page of the book, as well as its title – is independence, its importance in the music and radio universe, and WOXY's dogged commitment to it. Maddeningly, she never exactly defines that either, though you can tease out her meaning with a little effort: "Listening to WOXY was a way to both experience independence and connect to other people who wanted more independence than the conservatism of either corporate radio or the local culture could offer." "97X's anticonservative political programming and activism helped the station stay independent from corporate radio orthodoxy." "WOXY's philosophy... is the idea that true independence is possible only if you practise it with and for other people." The term as James uses it seems to imply freedom from large, suffocating media corporations and simultaneously something like community. On the latter, James makes a point of distinguishing good independence from the heartless every man for himself kind espoused in Reaganite/Thatcherite neoliberalism. But the concept is so obviously crucial to James's argument that it deserves to be nailed down more explicitly.

Perhaps the biggest takeaway of the book, politics and broadcasting industry machinations aside, is the importance of radio, and cultural affinity groups generally, in people's lives. The devotion and passion felt by everyone in WOXY's orbit, both the station's staff and its listeners, is real and moving to read about. This goes well beyond the music played, and is all the more poignant considering that leftish, playful WOXY sat in the middle of a rabidly conservative part of the US as the Christian fundamentalist movement and post-Reagan neoliberalism mowed down everything in their path. WOXY thus served as an oasis for isolated punks, queers and other "misfits", helping them find their people and undoubtedly keeping many of them sane or even alive.

Dave Mandl

A survey of the experiences of Black jazz writers is as damning as it is inspirational

By Raymond Cummings

Ain't But A Few Of Us: Black Music Writers Tell Their Story
Willard Jenkins (Editor)
Duke University Press Hbk 328 pp

If *Ain't But A Few Of Us* has a central question, it is "Why aren't there more Black jazz writers?" Among the profound beats of this kaleidoscopic text, edited by jazz-world author, producer and all-around impresario Willard Jenkins, is that there aren't just myriad answers – there are also myriad perspectives, tangents, and many, many more questions posed. That's partially a function of format: via email, Jenkins interviewed Black publishers, editors, columnists, historians, educators and others from various generations about how they arrived at jazz writing or how jazz writing found them. Their responses, which began to emerge in 2009 as part of an online series that shares its title with this book, are revelatory, inspiring, passionate, damning and sobering. The present cultural health of "serious music", as so many contributors here term the genre, opens into a widening gyre of economic and social problems and inequities.

Overlap exists in origin stories: music courses or private lessons, parents' vinyl stashes or family members playing serious music, early exposure to critic Amiri 'LeRoi Jones' Baraka's work. They all came to realise what Chicago writer and radio DJ Rahsaan Clark Morris did: "The thought occurred to me that Black folks should be in control of their own culture and of how it is appraised and criticality approached." This most original of 20th century artforms, minted by African-Americans, is curated by outsiders. While the racism, segregation and exclusion – unconscious and otherwise – infecting other industries and fields plays a role, it doesn't help that urban jazz clubs which once thrived in Black communities have been erased by gentrification, that music education in communities of colour has been cut from school budgets, or that over the years the genre has been elbowed out of public life by other distractions and the Black pop behemoth that's come to dominate shrinking editorial bottom lines (it also doesn't help that jazz, in its earliest days, bore a sinful stigma that lingers in some quarters).

"I think that for many parts of Black America, if not all of America, jazz has become something of an archeological dig for those who have the time and intellectual leaning to pursue that type of thing, and most of those people with that luxury are not Black Americans," Washington, DC writer Steve Monroe notes. In reference to the dearth of jazz coverage in African-American music publications, former *Billboard* staffer Janine Coveney is blunter: "Whose face on the cover will sell more magazines – Dee Dee Bridgewater or Beyoncé? David Sanchez or Jamie Foxx?"

As purse-strings tighten, placing pieces or securing book contracts about Black jazz lives and histories that don't emphasise the salacious becomes more challenging. Millennial voices like Bridget Arnwine, Angelika Beener and Anthony Dean-Harris, spotlit here, offer some hope, even as one notes how many of their spiritual forebears eventually drifted away from jazz writing itself. To survive and ultimately thrive, professions can't persist as mere vocations; they demand successive generations who can afford to pursue the educational paths necessary to dedicate themselves to the work.

"There is an entire history of Black jazz writing to be unearthed," muses Thelonious Monk biographer Robin DG Kelley. "It would be something to put together the best of this work." The 90 page anthology section that concludes *Ain't But A Few Of Us* points the way by playing intense, discordant critical notes: Baraka's lacerating broadside "Jazz And The White Critic", Barbara Gardner's profile of hard bop bandleader Horace Silver, Greg Tate's loving, poetic linkage of vintage jazz to modern pop, and more besides. ○

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On Screen

Films & DVDs

Boom: A Film About The Sonics
Jordan Albertsen (Director)
Scratched Vinyl Films 2018, 76 mins

A slow-burning fuse acts as a recurring visual metaphor for Jordan Albertson's cinematic salute to the musical career of early 1960s US garage rockers The Sonics. The image follows a chronological trail that begins with their formation and finally detonates in triumphant celebration as, decades later, they reform. The film is also a tender tribute to the director's father, who introduced Albertsen to the group's early albums *Here Are The Sonics* (1965) and *Boom* (1966) after hearing him playing grunge rock records in his bedroom.

This unexpected musical revelation from his father set Albertsen on a journey to track down the group and tell their story, how they came together, what drove them apart and what happened next. The nine chapters making up this biopic begin with The Sonics' formation in their hometown of Tacoma, Washington, with interviews from bass guitarist Andy Parypa, his guitarist brother Larry, keyboard player Gerry Roslie, drummer Bobby Bennett and Rob Lind on saxophone. Also interviewed is Buck Ormsby, former bass guitarist for garage rock legends The Wailers and founder of Etiquette Records, who released The Sonics' first recordings.

Ormsby's contribution to The Sonics saga is significant, from his initial reaction to hearing the group's proto-punk sound and the adverse/epiphanic effect it had on others who came into contact with their music, to the sense of inner fulfilment he feels when witnessing them play their final reunion concert in 2015. Although they started playing the rock 'n' roll standards of the day (Richard Berry's "Louie Louie" being a primal influence), Ormsby wisely encouraged The Sonics to write their own material. They came up with "The Witch", a raw-edged guitar grind-out boosted by Bennett's thundering drum assault and Roslie's screaming vocals. Recorded live at full volume in a tiny local two-track studio, Ormsby insisted that no compression was made to the recording in order to "get a little blood coming off the walls".

When first released, "The Witch" was castigated as "devil music", but after it was reissued with new song "Psycho" on the flip it became a smash radio hit – one that got heard by a far larger audience than anyone could have possibly imagined.

Albertsen's quest takes him to London where, informed by fellow enthusiast Yvan Serrano, he learns to his amazement that The Sonics have long enjoyed a devoted fan base in the UK and Europe – while back in Seattle grunge rockers such as Soundgarden's Kim Thayil, Mudhoney's Mark Arm and The Presidents Of The USA's Chris Ballew attest to the importance of the group's influence on their own work. Alongside The Sonics, Ballew also lists The Kingsmen, The Wailers, The Young Fresh Fellows and Paul Revere & The Raiders as vital contributors to the city's party rock scene adding, "If you want to learn about Seattle, go backwards".

Albeit occasionally slight and fannishly wide-eyed in places, Albertsen's footage provides an informative filmic contribution to the history of North West America's 60s garage rock scene that spotlights one of the movement's main instigators. The fuse The Sonics lit in 1963 may have since burnt out, but the explosion it caused still resonates.

Edwin Pouncey

Stills from *Boom: A Film About The Sonics*

Courtesy Scratched Vinyl Films

WNYU: The World's Best Radio Station In The World
Christina Batte (Director)
WNYU/YouTube 2022, 40 mins

Back in the early 1990s, I followed a radio-making course at London's Morley College. It was taught by two BBC World Service veterans who took us into the recording studios of that imposing establishment to learn the basics of operating an open-reel tape recorder and craft five-minute talk radio packages. We got to edit magnetic tape, add yellow leader at either end and remove speech hesitations by marking them up with a wax pencil, slicing them out with a razor blade and splicing the tapes together with Scotch tape. I remember an interview exercise where I was so nervous my foot repeatedly kicked against the desk, adding an emphatic bass beat to every word.

I doubt the students running New York University's radio station WNYU 89.1 FM would worry about glitches such as these. In their 40 minute DIY documentary, interviews are interrupted by staffers trooping through the room, fingers find their way across the lens of the hand-held camera and goofy mannerisms or plain inaudibility are something to be feted not feared. Glitches? Bring 'em on.

Ken Mills, blogger and consultant in public radio, notes that despite its signal reach, which extends beyond New York City to the suburbs, WNYU 89.1 FM has only a few thousand listeners every week. "The good news is that WNYU is programmed 100 per cent by students," he says. "The bad news is these students are probably the only listeners."

In the safe padded setting of their HQ, more youth hostel in style, where walls are taped with polaroid selfie snaps and posters, or covered in graffiti and stickers, the documentary considers the vexing question of what the W in WNYU stands for (anything from WOOO to Words) and what WNYU means to the students who work there. Interviewees describe the strong sense of community that exists and how the radio station offered them a sanctuary during the two year hiatus of Covid, when their college courses ground to a halt; others namecheck NPR (National Public Radio) as the place of their dream job.

WNYU programming aims to pack "the net grid with weird shows" – *Sonic Sludge* and *Plastic Tales From The Marshmallow Dimension*, for example – intercut with a kind of verbal doodling on air. Some are intriguing: *Scatterbrain* explores ideas devoid of genre, space and time, such as the recurrence of the word banana in a title or a song.

The zines that the radio archive department has put together hit the screen with a visual avalanche of collective physical material, all collage and hand-drawn, a celebration of playlist typing and art college creativity, but the presence of an archive suggests the radio station has a history, barely explored in this documentary. Who would know that WNYU started out as New York University Radio Workshop Club in 1949? That it not only shares its 89.1 FM airwave frequency with rival Fairleigh Dickinson University but also with the United Nations (who agreed to waive their rights back in 1964)? When the revolution comes, it will not start at the HQ of WNYU.

At the end of the documentary, one student remarks: "When we're 70 and old rockers and die of a drug overdose, they'll play this footage..." Let's hope someone remembers where to find it.

Deborah Nash

Stills from *WNYU: The World's Best Radio Station In The World*

YouTube

On Site

Exhibitions, installations, games, etc

Season

Scavengers Studio, PlayStation/Steam/Epic

Have you ever paused in the middle of a video game simply to contemplate your virtual surroundings? Not paused as in hit the pause button – not turned off the game, just eased your urge to level up: to shoot or run or jump, or whatever adrenaline-raising action the game was engineered to impel you to accomplish. Now, what if a game was explicitly designed for you to take such a pause? What if paying attention to the world around you – to the world within the game, the world of the game – was the goal of the game? What if observing – looking, listening, recording – was itself the principal game mechanic?

That game is *Season*, from the Montreal based studio Scavengers. *Season* begins like many games, with a mix of preparation and exposition. Your character, here an emotionally sensitive kid named Estelle, assembles gear for her upcoming hero's journey. However, instead of a laser pistol or magical scimitar, Estelle gathers a camera, a notebook and, of all things, a pocketable audio recorder. For Estelle's goal – your goal – is to capture the essence of her world as you explore. You'll make field recordings, take photographs and sketch drawings along the way.

The setting of *Season* is Earth-like, albeit mired in global psychic trauma and facing an imminent gloomy catastrophe — then again, that sounds a lot like our Earth. Playing Estelle, you cover a lot of territory, solve puzzles, pet the occasional cow, and talk with the few people you encounter. Key to the game's tonal quality is a strange phenomenon that saps people's memories. In the face of generational memory loss, you forge memories by documenting what you come across: empty homes, artistic totems, and the wonders of the natural world. There's a strategic logic here: consider the numerous field recording projects that chronicle the sounds of melting glacier ecosystems (Jana Winderen's *Energy Field*) or vanishing communities (Ernest Hood's *Neighborhoods*) and preserve what would otherwise be lost.

Estelle's audio recorder is key to the gameplay – and to the game's enjoyment. Sound permeates *Season*. We encounter strange instruments, an abandoned payphone, wind chimes, and recorded messages. From the opening, we're primed not just to look and to do, but to listen. In *Season*, listening is doing. When you elect to record audio, the light yet persistent score (by Spencer Doran of Visible Cloaks) recedes, and the quotidian sounds – birdsong, wind, not to mention noises intrinsic to the paranormal environment – come to the fore. Your main job as a player is to collect such sounds, along with objects, photos and illustrations.

Some of these instances trigger poetic language and narrative details within the game. Others are simply ways to register your own experience. If you play on a PlayStation 5, your controller's vibration distinguishes story-essential moments from merely interesting ones. On the one hand, this is a helpful tool for orientation. On the other, it draws a firm line where the game aspires for something more ephemeral and ambiguous. Loitering in video games is one of the unique pleasures of our increasingly technologically mediated leisure time (the artist Cory Arcangel primed us for this sort of ambient inactivity with *Super Mario Clouds* over 20 years ago). But there are trade-offs: as a player, you need to decide if you want to record another scenic vista, or if you want to stick with things that get Estelle to the finish line quickly.

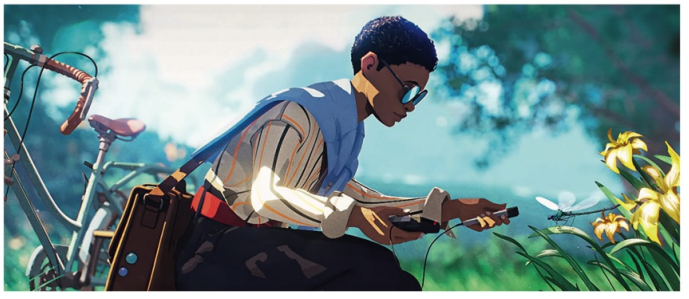
Like the rickety bicycle that Estelle rides around, her Polaroid-style camera has a retro analogue quality to it, albeit with Instagram-style filters. Part of this is functional: since the camera prints photos, they can be transferred to Estelle's notebook. But such old school tools in combination also lend a sense of nostalgia to the underlying story. Throughout, Estelle has a solemn purpose. She is trying to maintain memories of civilisation in advance of this imminent change – the forthcoming 'season' from which the game takes its name. For a player, this duty brings significance to the act of observing. It's quite remarkable to think that a video game might reinforce deep listening behaviour for users in their everyday lives.

Season's visuals are familiar from indie-gaming: impressionistic due as much to budget constraints as to creative vision. If you've played indies, you're used to the low level suspension of disbelief that allows for footsteps (and bicycle wheels) hovering above ground, and pixelated foliage glitching in and out of reality. In general, though, the scenes are gorgeously realised (visually and audibly), whether it's a mundane bridge creaking underfoot or a phosphorescent garden vibrating with Fortean voices. Even in this game engineered for an appreciation of the ambience of the moment, you'll want to pause and appreciate the ambience of the moment – over and over. Sometimes the spell would break in my living room and I'd realise I'd spent 20 minutes riding my bike around, looking and listening with Estelle, carefree despite the looming narrative.

Scavengers advertises "6 to 12 hours" of gameplay for *Season*, which was written by its creative director, Kevin Sullivan. An inexpert (and motion sickness-prone) gamer myself, I'll admit that I got hung up in the extended Tieng Valley section, circling its numerous sites (a shrine, a dig, a gas station, etc), collecting items, chatting with refugees and yet struggling to get to the story's next phase.

When you've completed the game, you may want to play it all over again at half your original speed – taking more pictures and recording more ambient sound, or perhaps doing neither. Perhaps putting the in-game gadgets aside for the most part, and just looking and listening, comfortable with the knowledge that, at least in our world, memories can simply be memories.

Marc Weidenbaum



Stills from *Season*

Coutesy Scavengers

On Location

Festivals, concerts, clubs

Bergamo Jazz Festival
Various venues, Bergamo, Italy
Mixmonk – Joey Baron (drums), Bram de Looze (piano) and Robin Verheyen (saxophones) – open the festival's main theatrical events at Teatro Sociale in the upper town. The trio formed in 2017, when saxophonist Verheyen was looking for a way of celebrating Thelonious Monk's centenary. Verheyen has lived in New York since 2012, working with double bassist Gary Peacock and drummer Billy Hart.

From the opening piece, Mixmonk exploit dynamics imaginatively. That means deploying quiet registers, and often they seem to be walking on eggshells – which reinforces Baron's character as a poet of percussion, though he's also as eager and enthusiastic as ever. After the drummer's unaccompanied closing cadenza, the trio segue into the second piece, an interpretation of the beautiful ballad "Monk's Mood". Neil Hefti's big band composition "Lil' Darlin", first recorded on Count Basie's *The Atomic Mr Basie*, is an unusual choice for a trio. The saxophonist often sounds rather like Warne Marsh on tenor, though with wispier fragments of sound – part of the trio's less is more aesthetic. The encore is "Bye-Ya", only the second Monk composition in this set, with Verheyen's impassioned soprano saxophone roughened with multiphonics.

Strange to report, I've reviewed ECM albums for many years but never one of the seven by Nik Bärtsch. The pianist comes out of American minimalism, which was influenced by jazz – but his music is composed, not improvised, and involves switches in sequencing. Unlike his ECM recordings, this is a solo recital, held in one of the wonderful historic venues that Bergamo has in abundance, Teatro Sant'Andrea in the Città Alta. His music has a groove but not swing. It's aptly been called Zen funk, and it has trance-like qualities. Here's an artist with no doubts – none that are visible anyway. The result is curiously hypnotic, but I ponder how often I want to hear his work.

At the main concert venue of Teatro Donizetti, with its a wonderful horseshoe-shaped acoustic, we hear charismatic alto saxophonist Lakecia Benjamin. She's a John Coltrane acolyte in the tradition of Jackie McLean, Arthur Blythe and Gary Bartz, whose careers were transformed by the tenor saxophonist's influence. It's a fine band, but initially E J Strickland's drums are set too high in the mix. Pianist Zaccai Curtis is almost inaudible, though that's corrected later. He often plays right hand on acoustic, left hand on electric piano. Highlights include a rather heated take of the spiritual "Amazing Grace", and a plangent version of Patrice Rushen's "Jubilation" . "Moods", from Benjamin's new album *Phoenix*, ends the set and features a fiery saxophone-drums duet, followed by "My Favourite Things" as a brief coda. By now the band have long overstayed their time, and they aren't allowed back on stage – but they do appear again to wave at the audience from the rear of the venue!

Hamid Drake's tribute to Alice Coltrane makes this a real Trane evening. Drake describes how meeting her for the first time at a gig when he was 16 inspired him as an artist. The seven-piece supergruppo, as the programme has it, includes dancer Ngoho Ange and guest Shabaka Hutchings on tenor saxophone, clarinet, African flutes and shakuhachi. Jan Bang contributes subtle electronic shadings. The first piece features vocals from Ange, and gradually acquires a groove from Jamie Saft on Hammond organ – he later switches to piano – in excellent partnership with local master Pasquale Mirra on vibraphone. Highlights include a Coltrane-ish spiritual, with Josh Abrams on arco bass, and a performance with a gorgeously mellow jazz rock groove. The standout is a piece with a broad, relaxed Elvin Jones-like midtempo groove, with Hutchings on tenor saxophone.
Andy Hamilton

Hamid Drake

aya x MFO
Purcell Room, London, UK
London artist aya cuts an ominous presence as she cranes over the mic and howls through the unsettling, overbearing sample from "somewhere between the 8th and 9th floor", the opening track from her 2021 album *im hole*. A slow pulsing white light casts a shadow over her figure. She's imbuing a necessary dirtiness into this formal concert room inside Queen Elizabeth Hall, ushering the audience into the sewer with her via a wind tunnel. She twists the song's words into a knowing nod, her lyrics teasing herself by playing on her own fatigue. And so begins the constant spiral of the night.

The light cylinders scattered about the stage flash chaotically alongside a new track of blistery, rattling beats coated in a shell of curdling circuit board static and squeaking rubber. Snippets of lyrics spit across the screen suspended at the back of the stage, repeated and misspelled. The artist Marcel Weber aka MFO's visuals heighten the sense of haphazardness that aya's music teeters on the edge of.

It feels strange being seated as a concoction of jackhammer kicks, oscillating feedback and splintering vocals pummel us from all sides. I want to throw my body about, allow the music to use me as a crash test dummy. I'll have to settle for headbanging in my seat, living vicariously through her as she bounces round the stage. She's gleefully staring into her laptop, the screen lighting her face, her energy emanating into the room. Every so often she tries to downplay her own skill, despite her intricately messy manipulation of the source material, her treatment of "OoB ProsThesis" being a prime example. At one point she slows the track "dis yacky" into a half step version of itself, enhancing the feeling that the listener is being dragged backwards by sirens and medical equipment-like sounds.

"The most important thing about a live set is that you [the artist] win," aya off-handedly interjects three quarters of the way through her show, reminding us that although she has invited us in, this is primarily a space for her own enjoyment – and she is winning. A byproduct of he success is that the audience are, too. A poignant moment occurs when she introduces a new reworking of an old track, thanking her best friend "for doing what only best friends can do and making you realise what is missing" from the song.

One of the best bits of the night is the closer. Slow sparkling granular sounds filter in, with aya sprawled on the floor as the song starts. I don't recognise it immediately; the juddering audio is stretched almost to the point of indiscernibility. A stuck wave, buffering in a crashing loop. It's similar to her output from 2018 on *ell oh eff tea too oh won ate*. The lyrics strain through, bitcrushed, and I laugh, recognising the song as an edit of Atomic Kitten's "Whole Again". A fitting end, given her debut album's title – suggesting that, yes, we're stuck in a hole again.
Misha Farrant

Borealis
Various venues, Bergen, Norway
"You have the right to practise your culture and to develop your culture," states Viktor Bomstad during *Lyder Fra Mellomrommene* (*Sounds From The Spaces Between*), a "talkshow-collage" hosted by Borealis resident artist Elina Waage Mikalsen. The event – part

Rosetti - PHOCUS

Big Ears returns with a packed programme that is both ambitious and rewarding

By Bill Meyer

Big Ears Festival
Various venues, Knoxville, US

In slow motion metronomic fashion, Russell Greenberg strikes his vibraphone while the other three members of Yarn/Wire patiently navigate the aisles of St John's Cathedral, catching and redirecting its vibrations with snare drums. Listen, their actions seem to say, but keep moving. That's as good a prescription as any for dealing with the profusion of sound options offered by Big Ears, the festival taking over downtown Knoxville, Tennessee for the tenth time since 2009.

With nearly 200 events spread across 13 venues and four days, it forces you to make choices. For example, you could catch art country singer Terry Allen or minimalist Phill Niblock, but not both. Basic pass holders have to skip some shows in order to get at the front of the lines for the ones they really want to see, and even the big spenders have to miss shows and scramble to get a bite to eat, since there are no breaks. But it also rewards chance-taking: if I hadn't ducked into an Irish bar because the line was short, I would have missed the gleefully funked up final act from Robert Ashley's *Perfect Lives*, where I wonder whether Varispeed vocalist Gelsey Bell's drawn-on mustache and Bobby Conn-worthy tracksuit break Tennessee's new anti-drag laws. There's no other event in North America that concentrates so much discerningly selected jazz, experimental, rock and Americana.

New composition is well represented this year. Yarn/Wire showcase their synthesis of sound and visual gestures, first during the opening performance, and again while sharing a sublime set of Annea Lockwood's environmentally aware, deeply human music with trumpeter Nate Wooley. Wooley also presents Éliane Radigue's *Occam X*, his streams of textured air and Doppler-inducing gestures implying continuities between the French composer's present acoustic and past electronic works. JACK Quartet display a command of both the durational arc and microscopic details in their rendition of Catherine Lamb's glacially paced epic, *Divisio Spiralis*.

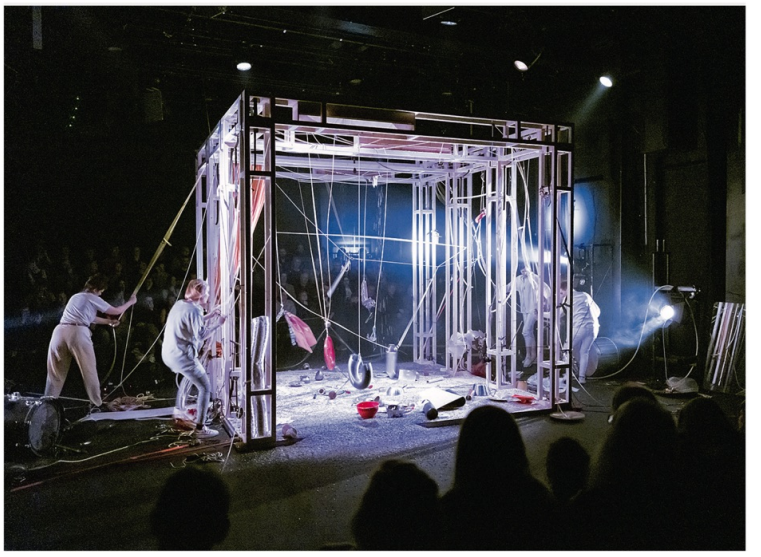
On a pair of recent records, Mary Halvorson combined her new sextet Amaryllis with Mivos Quartet, but at Big Ears, she performs with each sequentially. The choice pays off by revealing the streamlined gusto with which the former engages with the jazz continuum, and the psychedelic chamber music that results when Halvorson embeds her electric guitar within complex string compositions. Zoh Amba, a 22 year old Tennessean tenor saxophonist and pianist, fronts a steaming trio that stirs memories of Frank Wright and David S Ware. While it's fair to wonder how she might grow into an identity of her own, her mastery of her chosen sound cannot be denied. And Irreversible Entanglements vocalist Moor Mother delivers some jazz history lessons that frame the music as a cultural survival strategy while riding the combo's juggernaut of free grooves, rippling horn exchanges and baleful synthetic noise.

William Parker, on the other hand, steps outside of his own history to lead Mayan Space Station into territory that's new to him. Who would expect the bassist, aged 71, to suddenly lead a hot jazz rock trio? At least, that's how he, drummer Gerald Cleaver and guitarist Ava Mendoza start off. But as the music develops, Mendoza's blues-tinged textures melt into an uncategorisable maelstrom of mutable rhythms and Parker's shouted interjections. Here's hoping he has more surprises this out of character up his sleeve.

Mendoza is also, with Wendy Eisenberg and Shane Parish, part of Bill Orcutt Guitar Quartet. On record, Orcutt's *Music For Four Guitars* reconciles his coarse tonal language with his interests in structural rigour; in concert, both are preserved, but the ensemble push the project forward by investing Orcutt's angular rhythms with a sense of swing. And Xylouris White likewise find territory that's new to them, achieving a greater sense of dynamics by mixing their usual brash Cretan folk jams with more introspective instrumentals. If audiences need to keep moving to get the most out of Big Ears, these performers seem to have recognised that it's an opportunity to demonstrate their own progress. ○

Yarn/Wire

Ross Bustin



Pinquins in collaboration with Kjersti Alm Eriksen

discussion, part performance – forms the centrepiece of the Norwegian new music festival's celebration of Sámi (the indigenous people of the Fennoscandian Sàpmi region) experimental music.

Bomstad opens his set with an a cappella joik, creating an appropriate context for his collage of sputtering modular beats, processed guitar and archival samples of legendary joikers. Katarina Barruk's unaccompanied vocal set powerfully communicates the collective trauma of a marginalised people through abstracted song, extended vocal techniques and gesture. And in her sound installation in a Sámi hut on the mountains above Bergen, Mikalsen invites us to explore traditional ways of listening.

The question of developing traditional culture is a running theme of the 20th edition of Borealis. On the Sunday morning, we're taken for a swim in an outdoor pool, while local musician Mira Thiruchelvam and dancer Thanusha Chandrasselan perform a piece that combines elements from their Tamil heritage with heavy sub-bass and juddering beats.

Dewa Alit has pioneered a contemporary gamelan music built on a unique 11-note scale and unconventional playing techniques. His 16-piece Gamelan Salukat performs in Håkonshallen, a huge medieval banquet hall with a surprisingly dry acoustic that brings clarity to their shimmering textures. There's a strong sense of ritual and ceremony as the musicians synchronise their breathing to establish the tempo. One particularly stunning sequence sounds like computer music, the gamelan speeding through permutations of an extended tonal cluster. The effect is beautifully disorientating, as the brain attempts to process the intricate lattice of overtone-rich metallophone patterns.

The following evening, the Håkonshallen hosts an excellent programme from Ensemble Contrechamps. Presented in solidarity with the ongoing women-led revolution in Iran, Anahita Abbasi's *Faab IV/A Femme Fatale* explores a range of extended techniques – flute key taps, rubbed piano strings – before blossoming into a stop-start dynamic of glisses and trills. Jessie Cox's *Existence Lies In-Between* embeds unusual percussive timbres – tin foil played with brushes, hand-flexed drum skins – with a texture of bubbling flutes and circular bowing. Using the metaphor of the veil, Sofia Jernberg's ዐይነ-እርግብ (*Veil Or Eye Of The Dove*) raises questions about appropriation and decontextualisation, her virtuosic vocalisations – shrill twitters, sustained croaks – cutting across finely grained ensemble textures.

A thrilling realisation of the late Maryanne Amacher's electroacoustic piece *GLIA* moves from the faintest of string tones to an ecstatic oscillator fanfare. The psychoacoustic effects are bracing but, like plunging into an icy fjord, once you've embraced the sensation it becomes addictive.

In their collaboration with artist Kjersti Alm Eriksen, Norwegian trio Pinquins deftly manipulate a system of ropes and pulleys attached to a wooden frame, activating kinetic sculptures made from household and industrial objects. Their mechanical ballet makes for a marvellous spectacle, but there's a strong musicality at play, with the swinging sculptures bringing an exciting element of chance. In a more delicate meeting of musician and machine, violin and bass duo Vilde & Inga interact with composer and instrument builder Jo David Meyer Lynse's contraptions. Made from an alloy which expands when heated, his instruments creak and hum in response to the duo's drones, scrapes and harmonics.

Stewart Smith

Birds Of Paradise
TivoliVredenburg, Utrecht, Netherlands

A chorus of church bells is ringing out across Utrecht. Their sonorous clamour, intermingled with the chatter and bustle of people on the street, feels like a fitting soundtrack as I make my way to the labyrinthine multi-space venue TivoliVredenburg, where this afternoon's performance is prefaced by a talk on the art of listening.

In a small room where daylight filters dreamily through the round windows, the Nairobi born, Berlin based artist KMRU epitomises the beauty of deep listening with an immersive ambient set. It's a sit down and close your eyes kind of affair as he elicits stunning textural soundscapes from his bank of machines, with field recordings taken from around the city intermingling with long, meditative drones.

Belgian theatre director and countertenor Benjamin Abel Meirhaeghe, Icelandic producer/composer Valgeir Sigurðsson, and Brussels based violinist and electronicist Elisabeth Klinck follow with a thrilling, adroit performance commissioned exclusively for the festival. Written by the trio in Iceland across the space of just ten days, their pieces are captivating. The songs daringly explore the intersection between modern classical, electronic music and opera, and with his rhapsodic vocal delivery and charismatic stage presence, Meirhaeghe injects the dramatic compositions with joy and gentle humour.

Unique, tailor-made performances like these are what underpin this second edition of Birds Of Paradise. Across four days, artists undertake various forms of creative exchange as electronic music, avant pop, jazz and contemporary classical collide, with diverse and genre-defying results.

In TivoliVredenburg's expansive main hall, Bryce Dessner of The National arranges the world premiere of a suite from *Complete Mountain Almanac*, the album created by his sister, poet and multimedia artist Jessica Dessner, and Norwegian singer-songwriter Rebekka Karijord. Bryce also takes a seat among the Belgian orchestra Casco Phil to present three of his concertos, his guitar interweaving with star turns from Jörgen van Rijen on trombone and Katia and Marielle Labèque on piano.

There is more innovative orchestral collaboration between Dutch group Luwten, headed by Tessa Douwstra, and players from the Belgian baroque BOX Ensemble. Opener Laura Kampman steals the show, though, with her sound collages, combining voice memos and notes captured on her phone with minimalist electronics.

American experimental band Son Lux are the clear crowd favourites. "Six days ago we were on stage at the Oscars," says frontman and founding member Ryan Lott with an air of disbelief, referencing the group's soundtrack for the Academy Award-winning film *Everything Everywhere All At Once*. They storm through their back catalogue, at one point joined by the evening's opener, musician and vocalist Holland Andrews, for a gorgeous rendition of "Sever".

It's a classic case of saving the best for last, though, when American electronic producer and Planet Mu affiliate Jlin closes the festival with a euphoric live set. Combining Chicago footwork rhythms with shuddery drum machines and playful synths, she gets the seated audience up and dancing, before switching gears and leaving the stage as "Precision Of Infinity" – her track made with Philip Glass – plays out in its transfixing entirety.

Claire Francis

Johanne Karlsrud

Counterflows
Various venues, Glasgow, UK
Tap dancing, whip cracking and dumpling making are all onstage attractions at this year's Counterflows. Managing to pull off curatorial bravery with the laidback feeling of a small and welcoming gathering every single year, the Glasgow festival's 11th edition found more ways to dazzle and provoke with its celebration of art on the margins.

Things open with On Yee Lo in industrious, stern chef mode, boiling kettles and gently banging gongs before not so gently cajoling audience members onto the stage to make vegan dumplings for sharing out and eating. Her democratising of the space makes a fitting ice breaker for the weekend – volunteers are soon unfolding trestle tables, freestyling on gongs and figuring out the best way to run the dim sum production line. Confounding, entertaining and community building all at once.

The Wire 470 cover stars, the turntablist trio of Evicshen, Mariam Rezaei and Maria Chavez, take over next with their maximalist stampede through abstract turntablism. Rezaei mesmerizes with her glow in the dark nails' virtuosic stroking and pushing of vinyl, while Evicshen (Victoria Shen) piles on complex, shapeshifting textures via her self-made electronics and loud cracks of a whip. Chavez adds intriguing layers of musique concrète through amplified rocks and fragments of records. Hearing them unpack their anti-patriarchal process the following day in conversation with *Wire* contributor Frances Morgan is illuminating – they also reveal that their earlier performance was a tribute to the late Ryuichi Sakamoto.

At a Charles Rennie Mackintosh designed church in Maryhill, under an electric blue stained glass window, free improvisor and vocalist Maggie Nicols wails, noodles and squeals through Scots language protest songs before giddily singing about a new romance with someone she met on a bus. After a quick burst of tap dancing, Nicols is followed by violinist Silvia Tarozzi and cellist Deborah Walker, singing plaintive songs from the Emilia region of Italy. Their sharing of music used by badly paid women workers in the rice fields to support each other ties in with an ongoing Counterflows theme of collective care, with delicious Italian tongue twisters adding pops of bouncy rhythm.

The broad reach of the festival's programming is now a reliable delight. With its deliberately clashing styles and sometimes challenging performances, there always seems to be an obsessive curiosity underpinning the programmers' choices. A few hours after Australian cellist Judith Hamann brings the air to a palpable standstill with her stunning low drones and overtones in the Pyramid at Anderston (a 1960s brutalist beauty of a church), we are in the iconic old Arches nightclub, having our organs and hair vibrated by DJ Travella, from the Nyege Nyege roster. Hitting the ground in fifth gear, the producer from Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania jolts the room into a sudden fit of dancing with his ultra-fast, exhilarating blur of high bpm singeli. He is third on a bill at Platform (the old Arches) which begins with Lebanese-American artist Nour Mobarak, whose subtle set explores language and physical slapstick but suffers from noise bleed from the bar and a too-cavernous room. In the middle is a collaboration by returning Counterflows performers Cara Tolmie and Rian Treanor. Tolmie uses a vocal practice called internal singing, controlling her inhalations and exhalations in an utterly astonishing way, mimicking digital samples, luring the audience into a thrilling kind of experimental listening where they question what they are hearing.

Experiencing her breathwork and word play over Treanor's searching, hypnotic rave beats is the weekend's stone cold standout, hitting a sweet spot where skill and hedonism come together. An intersection where the truly inventive, massively enjoyable Counterflows festival often finds itself.

Claire Sawers

Claire Rousay
Grand Junction, London, UK
It feels strange at first to be listening to Claire Rousay in a church. She looks incongruous amid the high vaulted ceilings, frescoes of heaven and hell, sinners and the saved. It's not that this is exactly profane music. But there is something very worldly about Rousay's work. It speaks in a language and a voice that at once feels familiar, close.

Perched up on the stage in a black hoodie behind a MacBook, guitar on her lap, the pulpit looms menacingly over her. Immediately, she cuts through the tension. "Hi," she says, "I'm Claire," as if we were just two strangers – not several hundred – unexpectedly finding each other occupying adjacent chairs at a dinner.

Why would you go to a concert to see someone playing such personal music only to have them act silent and aloof on stage, she wonders. You might as well stay at home and listen to the record. "I'm going to get so personal you'll never want to listen to a record again." She's joking, sort of.

The concert is short, maybe 40 minutes or so, but it feels shorter, like it might trickle through your fingers and disappear before you know it. There's two longish tracks with a little more casual chitchat in between – mostly shout-outs and expressions of gratitude to various friends and collaborators. The elements are sparse and simple: the whistle of a drone, a few bruised arpeggios picked out on the guitar, emphasising the fret buzz as she slides from chord to chord like it's 1998, a swell of recorded strings, sung vocals murmured softly through a deluge of Auto-Tune, as if she were hiding under the covers talking quietly on the phone late at night so her parents in the room next door don't hear. But the emotional bite comes from the field recordings and spoken confessions that make up much of the background, all shuffles and scuffles colliding and intermingling, as well as the foreground focus. We hear the voices of young people talking about depression and drug abuse (*"I've OD'd two or three times … I, like, nearly died"*.). They might be friends of Rousay's or simply anonymous voices sourced from YouTube or TikTok. It doesn't really matter. The effect is universalising, as if the fragility expressed by the music is not merely her own, but that of a whole generation.

The second piece feels slightly more formal, less loose. The guitar is put away, replaced by plaintive keyboard notes. Rousay introduces the (recorded) voice of poet LA Warman, reciting in a clipped staccato. More drones and shuffling textures, sounds that feel familiar but not identifiable, as if almost out of earshot. And then it's over, almost before it really seemed to begin. The whole thing felt strangely like a dream, a fleeting crack that opened up in reality, creating a space for tender importunities and frank expressions of solidarity, somehow made all the more intimate by the many layers of technological mediation between audience and performer.

Rousay's music taps into a peculiarly 2020s sensibility. We have grown used to our exchanges with those closest to us coming accompanied by the swish and stutter of Zoom artefacts. Such small moments are here uplifted, lent some quiet dignity. Transcendence comes in many forms. Not every preacher needs a pulpit.

Robert Barry

Claire Rousay

Samuel Mitchell

The Philadelphia Orchestra
Carnegie Hall, New York, US
A light twinkle of string harmonics and shimmering vocals open *Vespers Of The Blessed Earth*. It's not a surprising palette from composer John Luther Adams, whose works often deal in gossamer hues and deep reflection. But here there's a sense of eeriness as the choir sings of the Earth's makeup in a sombre, descending motif. It's the introductory note to an invitation to mourn for our planet, setting the stage for an evening of quiet contemplation.

Vespers is a five movement work for choir and orchestra that had its New York premiere on 31 March performed by The Crossing choir and The Philadelphia Orchestra. Addressing themes of extinction and climate change, it meditates on the state of the planet. It's a new turn for Adams, whose most famous pieces, like Pulitzer Prize winner *Become Ocean*, use acoustic instruments to paint impressions of the natural world, celebrating its awe and beauty. But recently, he's looked to create more overt stories about the impacts of human-driven climate change: the album *Houses Of The Wind*, for example. Composed during 2021–22, it consists of aeolian harp recordings Adams made in Alaska in 1989 and ponders how much the planet has changed since then.

This music might have the potential to be his most personal and impassioned, but *Vespers* often feels distant in performance. During "Litanies Of The Sixth Extinction", The Crossing sing of many extinct species, implementing a sloping, sorrowful melody to float their scientific names. But it feels detached from the meaning of lost life, and by "Homosapien" they sound exhausted and lacklustre. "Night-Shining Clouds" similarly lacks depth. This movement grows from breathy pitches into grumbling basses, but instead of conjuring the ethereal or hazy sense of a cloud, the music feels muddy and directionless. Each player moves out of sync down the same unornamented scale, creating a dissonant cacophony that feels robotic.

But the final movement, "Aria Of The Ghost Bird", offers a glimpse of Adams at his most profound. In pieces like *Become Ocean*, his complex music holds so many contrasts – the ocean is at once vast and pleasant, unknowable and familiar. In this movement of *Vespers*, however, in which soprano Meigui Zhang sings the bird call of the extinct Hawaiian Kaua'i 'ō'ō, Adams reveals his uncertainty and fear about environmental collapse, but also his hope for future generations. Sung with a shroud of anguish and accompanied by a funereal bass, the bird's call is sweet and lovely. At the end, it's echoed from above in feathery tones, offering one final moment to think. After the music's last burst fades away, the audience pauses, hesitant, lost in thought. It's a lovely moment, but also a sad one. The bird won't sing again, but if we let its song sit within us, we'll be reminded to care more for the Earth before all its birds are silenced.
Vanessa Ague

Moin
Kings Place, London, UK
The purpose of theatre in the round is to draw the audience into the same space as the performers. Similarly, the purpose of the d&b audiotechnik system at Kings Place is to revolutionise live audio, providing speakers throughout the room to truly envelop the audience in sound. In the space, London post-punk unit Moin play in the centre of the room, with four of those speakers directly above them – the aim is for the sound to come from where the band are playing, as opposed to the usual set-up of speakers to the left and right. Spoiler alert: it's a game changer, probably the best live sound I've experienced.

Moin are a perfect band to test this new way of experiencing live music – their sound is busy in the low end, but distinct elements emerge from the mulch of guitars and synths. Theirs is a low fat cacophony, with an egalitarian spread of elements; every individual sound has its place in the racket. In the studio, Moin isolate and recontextualise each instrument, a collage job which lent its name to the band's second album *Paste*, released last year.

Heavy without being aggressive, they effortlessly sink into the groove of each track. "Melon" kicks off with its crunchy, circular guitar riff and disaffected (and disembodied) voice (*"Can you hear me? You don't know me but I know you"*). Drummer Valentina Magaletti maintains a trad grip for half the drum phrase, taking time to establish precision before swapping into the latter half's expansive landscape of driving post-punk. Her drumming is like grains of sand, delicate and graceful but scratchy, light and busy.

The band seem to communicate telepathically. Positioned in a circle, each faces the others but barely watch what they are doing. They operate as a single entity, insular and egalitarian, like the space itself. Their respective sounds swarm around the room, individually contributing to a greater whole. Though it feels like we are standing inside the music, the downside is that the stage gets in the way of those wanting to dance to it.

From the glacial sprawl of "Knuckle" to the tightly sparse "I Can't Help But Melt", the band are subtly chameleonic, changing shapes and tones to create supernatural sounds, from tremolos to screeching, fuzzed out feedback. For the final 20 minutes of Moin's set, the lights in the venue begin to strobe, progressively reaching more and more uncomfortable levels until audience members hide their faces inside coats, behind scarves or under hats. It's a strange way to end the gig, but if their aim is for all-encompassing sensory overload, they certainly achieve it.
Rosie Esther Solomon

Fred Moten/Brandon López/Gerald Cleaver
Cafe Oto, London, UK
"Are we free?" writer and poet Fred Moten asks the other members of his trio as they wind down their short residency. Lowering his drumsticks, Gerald Cleaver smiles, then shakes his head, "Nah. Just three." It's a neat pun, drawing together the many shades of (un)freedom that run through Black history and music. And as a send-off, it leaves the Oto audience chuckling uneasily, a fitting end to the torn and conflicted mood of these two shows. "The heartbeat of the beaten to death can't be unheard in this motherfucking music," Moten has already warned the crowd, earlier in the set, before adding, "Whether you don't like the music or you do, I do."

I do too. On last year's self-titled LP, López and Cleaver established a simple instrumental set-up – just amplified double bass and drums – and they stick to it here. Weaving together polyrhythmic lines, the trio continue to remap the terrain of jazz poetry, finding their way into thickets of feedback, extended techniques and improvised noise. When he's not reciting, Moten gets stuck in too, dragging his fingers across the microphone, scratching the table, humming, and even crooning the hooks of popular jazz ballads from his childhood.

He may be up for channelling Nancy Wilson, but he flatly refuses to leave his seat. Moten forces you to lean in and listen closely, lowering his voice and breathing out a string

Moin

Monika S Jakubowska

of boasts: *"I'm full of outer space, I'm free as dread, all night/With a voice that gets held back by surge protection"*. Like Rakim – an MC he reveres – Moten has a low energy style that shimmers, intimate and dazzling all at once. The occasional echoes of East Coast hiphop are conscious, and they are extended to the trio's instrumental chops, too. *"Drumming is a martial art"*, he grins at one point. *"Trap, set and touch: you got a gun up in your face/The four brushed chambers of Shaolin..."*.

Naturally, the parallels only go so far. Rather than turning the trio into a cipher and rapping off the dome, Moten remains glued to his laptop, face blue-lit throughout both shows. From the corner of the stage you can watch him flicking between prose and verse, choosing passages almost at random. Some fit less surely than others. For a quarter of an hour, the second set wanders into a tricky essay on etymologies, carefully unpacking the layers within term "epistrophe" (borrowed from Mingus) whose *"proto-Indo-European root is to wind"*, or so Moten murmurs.

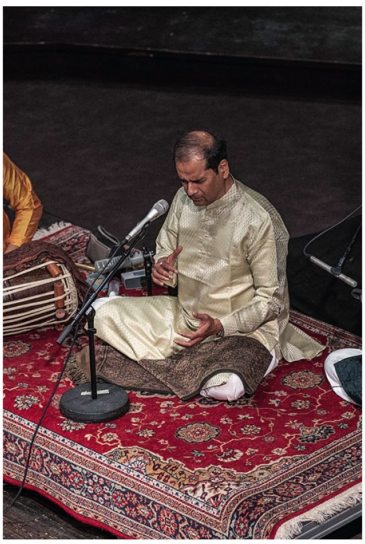
This kind of stuff can be riveting on the page, but López and Cleaver seem to lose interest: before long they drown out the speaker with a turbulent jam. At other points, however, the pair react to Moten's texts with such sharpness that it's hard to believe they haven't been drilled, like some poetry cafe version of The JB's. The most devastating spark of sonic telepathy falls on the opening night, when a barbed, punning Moten riff on the 1963 Alabama church bombing – *"Our birds-in-hand, our burning, our Birmingham/Where equivalence breaks down and song switches"* – abruptly snaps the groove in half. López strikes the body of his bass, and Cleaver is hurled into an entirely unfamiliar beat. The poet's language blurs, the music falls to pieces, and the trio enter a new space, alien and uncharted.

Rob Turner

Sixth Edition: Festival For Other Music
Various venues, Stockholm, Sweden

The other music in the name of this meticulously programmed event is deliberately vague, leaving plenty of space for different perspectives, both geographic and creative, but curator John Chantler always seems to have a sharp viewpoint, never more than with his latest iteration. Five separate venues host six disparate performances over the course of four evenings, with a focus on microtonality connecting music that might otherwise appear worlds apart.

Opening night features the long overdue return of Swedish native Catherine Christer Hennix, performing in her homeland for the first time in nearly five decades. She leads her Kamigaku Ensemble, a recently formed brass-heavy group, here featuring trumpeters Susanna Santos Silva, Ellen Arkbro and Hilary Jeffery (doubling on trombone), with Hennix and Mattias Hållsten on shō. Over the course of an hour at Fylkingen the ensemble explore a variety of intervals through sustained, shifting articulation. Volume rises and falls several times, and the gorgeous difference tones that emerge provide the heart of the performance, like a sun-soaked sea producing ever changing



Uday Bhawalkar

sparkles. What distinguishes this music from previous Hennix efforts is the live production of Marcus Pal, who pushes the sound through eight sub-woofers to generate a viscerally immersive environment that dramatically enhances those psychoacoustic effects while bathing listeners in otherworldly low end. The music fades away much like it began, leaving most of the audience in a state of levitation.

The same kind of state is generated by wildly different performances over subsequent nights. Balinese composer Dewa Alit and his 16-strong Gamelan Salukat provide a rare opportunity to experience modern gamelan in the flesh. His ensemble belies the required pinpoint precision and technical rigour with an infectious sense of joy, and observing how collective breathing functions as a structural device for the decadently contrapuntal music is nearly as compelling as the crystal clear, purely acoustic sounds emanating from the stage.

With one's eyes shut, the gamelan can sound like a single, albeit kaleidoscopic instrument, but that sensation is shattered when one observes the assemblage of tuned percussion and gongs triggered in a meticulously organised display of collective endeavour. Alit's music extends Balinese tradition with modern techniques that suggest sounds made with a computer, but witnessing it on stage makes clear that however futuristic the ideas seem, they are deeply connected to ancient practice.

The following night the brilliant Dhrupad singer Uday Bhawalkar – a disciple of the Dagar family, the ancient Hindustani form's most storied modern masters – shares music that seems as radical and forward-looking as anything I hear all weekend, despite being part of a practice spanning millennia. The singer presents several ragas, but during the second half of the 150 minute performance things truly take off, delivering an exquisitely inventive alap featuring sublime motific elaboration from the leanest material into a soaring climax that conjures the joyful release of qawwali music. He is deftly supported by Pratap Awad on pakhawaj, but it's his daughter and disciple Meghana Bhawalkar, playing tanpura, who charms the audience with her increasingly assured and sophisticated vocal harmonies as the night elapses.

Younger practitioners are also present, and while the return of former Stockholm resident Kali Malone, playing four-handed pipe organ music with help from Stephen O'Malley might have been anticipated, the best stuff arrives on closing night. Just intonation specialist Daniel Walden offers a beautifully measured world premiere of Kristoffer Svensson's austere harpsichord work *Som regn*, preceding another premiere: a new, as yet untitled work by Arkbro played by an 11-piece hybrid ensemble of Stockholm figures and members of Berlin's Harmonic Space Orchestra. It is a masterfully concise exploration of a handful of gorgeously harmonised chords, each one lifting the audience closer to nirvana, and providing a perfect ending.

Peter Margasak

Tremor
Various venues, São Miguel, Portugal

"They are the future," declares Angel Bat Dawid, gesturing towards the children who have gathered eagerly at her feet during her secret performance at Tremor, the adventurous arts festival located in the Portuguese archipelago of Açores. For the event's tenth edition, the avant jazz oracle, clarinettist and bandleader has created a special piece with the 40 plus member community band Filarmónica Fundação Brasileira titled *Portugal Invented Racism*, which calls for a powerful closing critique of systemic racism and Portugal's role in the Transatlantic slave trade, but ultimately places hope in future generations. Joined by multisensory artist Sophiyah E – whose glass-shattering vocal operatics transcend the physical realm – the duo's beautiful performance moves me to tears.

Fuelled by a towering stack of amps, Divide And Dissolve also bring a political focus to Tremor. Guitarist Takiaya Reed addresses white supremacy and confronts Portugal's colonial legacy while turning in the loudest performance of the festival with the duo's floor-shaking doom metal. During the course of the week, the Tremor stage is employed as a platform for vivid storytelling and protest as much as it is for music. Insights on anti-fascism, cruising and queerness are paired with traditional melancholic fado by Fado Bicha, whose poetic, political pop gems unfold like miniature epics.

Over at the marina's Portas do Mar, Barcelona duo Dame Area explore the meeting point between punk and dance music, with thunderous live percussion and piercing yelps. Tremor's multiform music policy fully caters to the dancefloor and leading the charge that night is Brazilian born, Lisbon based DJ King Kami whose funky electro and rave includes the gold standard of finger pointy 90s trance tunes: Da Hool's "Meet Her At The Love Parade".

Thursday evening offers a trip to the northern part of the island and the town of Ribeira Grande, where Portugal's beloved queer DIY bedroom punks Vaiapraia, fronted by

Dawid Laskowski

the stage diving dynamo Rodrigo Vaiapraia, stir up a sweaty riot at cultural centre Arquipélago. The following day, Lucrecia Dalt magically transforms the understated marina space into a cinematic fantasia aided by Alex Lázaro, described by Dalt as "an alien salsero who plays percussion like nobody's business". Switching up the mood, Bristol based vocalist, DJ and producer Grove harnesses rowdy UK garage energy and leads anti-royal chants that precede a glitzy, groove-laden 6am finish from in-demand Lisbon DJ Chima Isaaro.

At Tremor, it's neither a marathon nor a sprint but a hike (or two), and the festival's outdoor component offers the chance to enjoy music among the island's volcanic cratered contours, neon green ferns and bubbling hot springs. I notch up over 40,000 steps hiking through forests and along coastal paths partly soundtracked by the guttural roars of Holocausto Canibal's original composition on my headphones. The Portuguese grindcore veterans round off their trail with a performance in a hydroelectric power station. Later that day, Cobracoral's a cappella voice experiments, which touch on Mediterranean styles of polyphonic singing, feel like an extension of the forest itself. The trio's brightly coloured face coverings give the impression of tropical birds while their sound mimics the natural world as they coo, clack, chirp and ululate.

Given that this ability to create full immersion in the landscape is a core element of the festival, the mineral-rich thermal pool at Parque Terra Nostra is the ultimate site-specific showstopper, reinforcing the notion that nature itself is in many ways the headline act at Tremor. As we collectively plunge into the warm water while Basque synth-folk artist Verde Prato performs on the makeshift poolside stage, it's a shared moment of wonder only heightened by the welcome drizzle of rain and the reminder that we are literally all on an island somewhere in the middle of the Atlantic ocean.

April Clare Welch

Fado Bicha

Object Collection: HOUSECONCERT + Neil Luck & Mimi Doulton
Cafe Oto, London, UK

Neil Luck and Mimi Doulton support Object Collection on their first night at Cafe Oto. They perform 'folk' songs from the British Isles. A votive antiphon from pre-Reformation England found in Salisbury Cathedral written by an anonymous monk; an animal husbandry song from the Outer Hebrides for shearing sheep; a spell from *The Grand Grimoire* for making yourself invisible; a song from the 1970s about the Enfield haunting, "Janet Has A Friend", about a poltergeist who speaks in a weird deep voice through a young girl.

Except the spell consists of Luck singing through a length of plastic corrugated tubing and smashing a pile of butter knives on a piano stool; the antiphon has him screaming with his hand covering his mouth; and in "Janet Has A Friend" he repeatedly blows up a balloon and lets the air out into his mouth while he forms words to produce a ghostly fart voice. In a song about the healing properties of ash leaves, Luck plays a blade of grass and makes a series of inhuman squeaks, animal shouts and bird calls blending with the more straightforward soprano singing of Doulton. It is a moment of arte povera brilliance.

The Brooklyn based group Object Collection are best known in Europe for their 2016 opera *It's All True*, the material for which was taken from the live archive of the post-hardcore band Fugazi. Using everything apart from the songs, they built a 100-minute opera out of the singer shouting at the audience (complaining about moshpit etiquette, local leftist politics etc), guitar noise, feedback and assorted drum thwacking. *HOUSECONCERT* grows out of a similar musical world and contains sets of short but largely indistinguishable songs. Kara Feely on drum kit invariably hammers out the crotchet pulse, Meg White-style, while guitars shriek and the vocalists repeat words and cryptic phrases over and over again: *"Talking talking talking talking talking"* or *"44 houses 44 houses 44 houses"*. Object Collection turn Cafe Oto into a basement for a set of heavy garage rock. Extremely heavy, at one point five drummers are blasting away – hugely loud for essentially a high street cafe.

Theatrically there is a lot of wandering about the stage and doing normal stuff: eating a sandwich, plugging lamps in, winding cables. Two performers thread luminous string around and through the audience. Some old Object Collection favourites return in this piece: a performer wearing a costume of cardboard boxes, rituals around old tourist postcards – what made you think they'd do something new? They are punitively anti-virtuosic, belligerently anti-romantic.

A performer spends much of the opening of the piece roaming around the audience behind me asking, *"Have you heard of telepathy music?"*. This tees up the theme of the occult, which runs throughout the piece. Two performers are drunk magicians, playing with top hats and playing cards. James Oldfield is a sweaty 1970s cabaret performer organising card tricks and a mirror gazing ceremony. One member hammers nails into a piece of wood; another staggers arms out like a mummy; yet another has a casual conversation with an audience member in the front row. The experience is a bit like sitting outside Brixton tube station: noise, music, talking, shouting and constant restless movement all coming together to make a scattered and stressful experience that constantly splits and fragments your attention but leaves you breathless.

Edward Henderson

Sonic Protest
Various venues, Paris, France

The name resonates even stronger this year. Sonic Protest's 20th edition takes place in Paris and its suburbs as large daily demonstrations against pension reforms spring up in the city and across the country. The two week festival is a genuine community effort from various artist-run venues, independent cultural spaces, galleries, a radio station and many artists to showcase great underground music while also assuring no one is left behind in these chaotic times. Between performances, the audience is called up to contribute to the strike fund.

At the jammed theatre Le Générateur in Gentilly, Berlin hardcore trio Cuntroaches dump actual trash bags in the audience halfway through their energising performance, perhaps as a nod to the current trash collection strikes. Their blend of high speed punk and pitched down, delayed vocals, occasionally verging on disco, results in a bewildered moshpit, simultaneously headbanging and dancing. Later on, occupying lower frequencies and emitting earth shattering subs, Brooklyn based cellist and composer Leila Bordreuil maintains an equal intensity through her instrument's feedback and harmonics, except the audience is now motionless, subjugated to the drone.

"Please let me know if I go beyond the limits of this performance," says Marseille based Italian composer Alessandro Bosetti as he delivers a live cadavre exquis with his own sampled vocals at Saint-Ouen cultural space Mains d'Oeuvres on another night. Triggering words on his sampler and conversing with them, Bosetti explores and wears down the meaning of each term and idiom.

The speech gradually loses significance, growing weirder and funnier as synth tones mangle the colloquial expressions further and silences take more space, bringing to mind Jan Jelinek's album *Zwischen*. Disoriented, I get lost in the huge converted sports centre on my way to the bar but manage to find a seat to immerse myself in German composer Asmus Tietchens's subsequent performance. Lo-fi, quiet cistern recordings slowly fill the room and the slow-building piece reveals monumental ghostly spaces despite a limited sound spatialisation. Distant choirs add to the sombre poetry as the audience is transfixed by the parallel worlds emerging.

The colossal homemade local Distomobile sound system blasts 1990s jungle through the concrete block that forms Le Théâtre de l'Échangeur in Bagnolet, a couple of hundred metres from the motorway, right on the border of Paris. The doors have just opened for the

Carlos Brum Melo

The Paper Ensemble

festival's final night which runs until the early hours of the morning. Zurich Computer artist Valentina Vuksic kicks things off on the stage in the middle of the room, live-rebooting three computers asynchronously, diffusing hard drive clicks and crackles through phone microphones as she interferes with computer procedures. The enveloping hardware sounds are both distressing and relaxing, growing more cavernous and threatening as the performance unfolds.

Later on, Breton turntablist Guilhem All explores crackles further, these ones emanating from beaten up prepared vinyl records. On his three portable decks, plugged to effects pedals, he layers additional recordings of pitched down pads, arpeggios and bleeps. The concrete assemblage of loops and twisted synth noises offers an infinity of details to focus on or to lose oneself in.

Guttersnipe's Petronn Sphene takes to the main stage around midnight and instantly casts a spell on the whole packed room. There's no perceptible song structure but the intensity of Urocerus Gigas's vocals coupled to the ultra fast, distorted MPC tones get the audience headbanging and shaking, as strobe lights struggle to keep up with the pace of the music.

Gustave Evrard

Rewire

Various venues, The Hague, Netherlands

Outside Korzo, a theatre in The Hague's bustling centre, a local approaches and asks me – first in Dutch, then perfect English – why the queue? I explain we're waiting to see The Paper Ensemble, a group who make music using, well, paper.

His amused pleasure confirms my prejudices of the Dutch as a cheerily tolerant people, and he's off down the street with a smile across his face. Inside, the audience maintains respectful silence as the group – joined by Peruvian born, Berlin based synthesist Ale Hop – grapple with gigantic dust sheets or yank on paper rolls to create mighty honks. He'd probably have loved it.

Now 13 years old, Rewire is a city festival of an increasingly established stripe, lining up experimental classical and improvised music alongside contemporary club sounds, plus a packed programme of art installations and special commissions. Festivals like this succeed or fail on their surroundings, and The Hague feels particularly well-suited: openminded in spirit, small enough to get around on foot, with a remarkable density of cultural venues, from clubs and arts spaces to theatres and churches.

Trying to take it all in is thrilling, if a little vertiginous. In a 90 minute window you might experience a raging party set from Baltimore rap duo Infinity Knives and Brian Ennals; Godspeed You! Black Emperor in full apocalpytic clamour; and Alto Arc, whose debut live performance – a sort of avant metal opera – commences with George Clarke, singer for Deafheaven, being birthed from the folds of a wedding dress that transforms into a pair of enormous moth wings. The flipside is that skipping between venues, you might find yourself stuck in a queue, but the stacked bill means there's usually something else worth checking out just round the corner.

The churchyard outside Nieuwe Kerk is home to Matteo Marangoni and Dieter Vandoren's Komorebi, tiny chirruping artificial lifeforms that react to light, sound and movement. Inside, Ellen Fullman has installed her 20 metre Long String Instrument, and joined by chamber music ensemble The Living Earth Show, she performs three times on Friday, the instrument's ringing tones elevated by the holy surroundings.

At the other end of the weekend, Patti Smith and Soundwalk Collective present the world premiere of *Correspondences*. Smith's poetry is often profound, occasionally a little heavy-handed, but impressive in its scope, touching on environmental apocalypse, the death of Pasolini and the possibility of salvation through art. Soundwalk Collective's accompaniment is subtle but evocative; as the performance unfolds, one chips at a monolith of ice that gradually puddles on the floor.

Three standout sets over the course of the festival come from solo artists. Hood pulled up, cap pulled down, Preston artist Rainy Miller intersperses opiated Auto-Tune raps with bursts of confrontational energy, panting panicked into the mic, or pushing through the crowd ranting like a street preacher. Afrorack, aka Uganda's Bamanya Brian, tweaks the controls of his custom-built synthrack, his lopsided dance music weaving between groove and abstraction. In the dimly lit basement of The Grey Space, Elvin Brandhi punches patterns into an MPC, creating staccato jolts that ripple through the audience like shockwaves.

"Objects don't have feelings," explains Maria Chávez at Expanding Turntablism, a talk upstairs at The Grey Space on Saturday evening. At their lunchtime show which follows the next day, Chavez and fellow turntablists Mariam Rezaei and Evicshen aka Victoria Shen expand on that premise with a performance for 13 turntables that celebrates destruction and chance as creative tools. Chávez piles up fragments of shattered records while Shen stalks the room, fingering spinning vinyl with styluses attached to her acrylic fingernails before picking up a whip and lashing it at a turntable, leaving the front row of the audience flinching.

You can see why it might wind up a certain stripe of vinyl purist, but ultimately a performance like this is constructive: a dizzying showcase of technique designed to blow the possibility space wide open.

Louis Pattison

Parcifal Werkman

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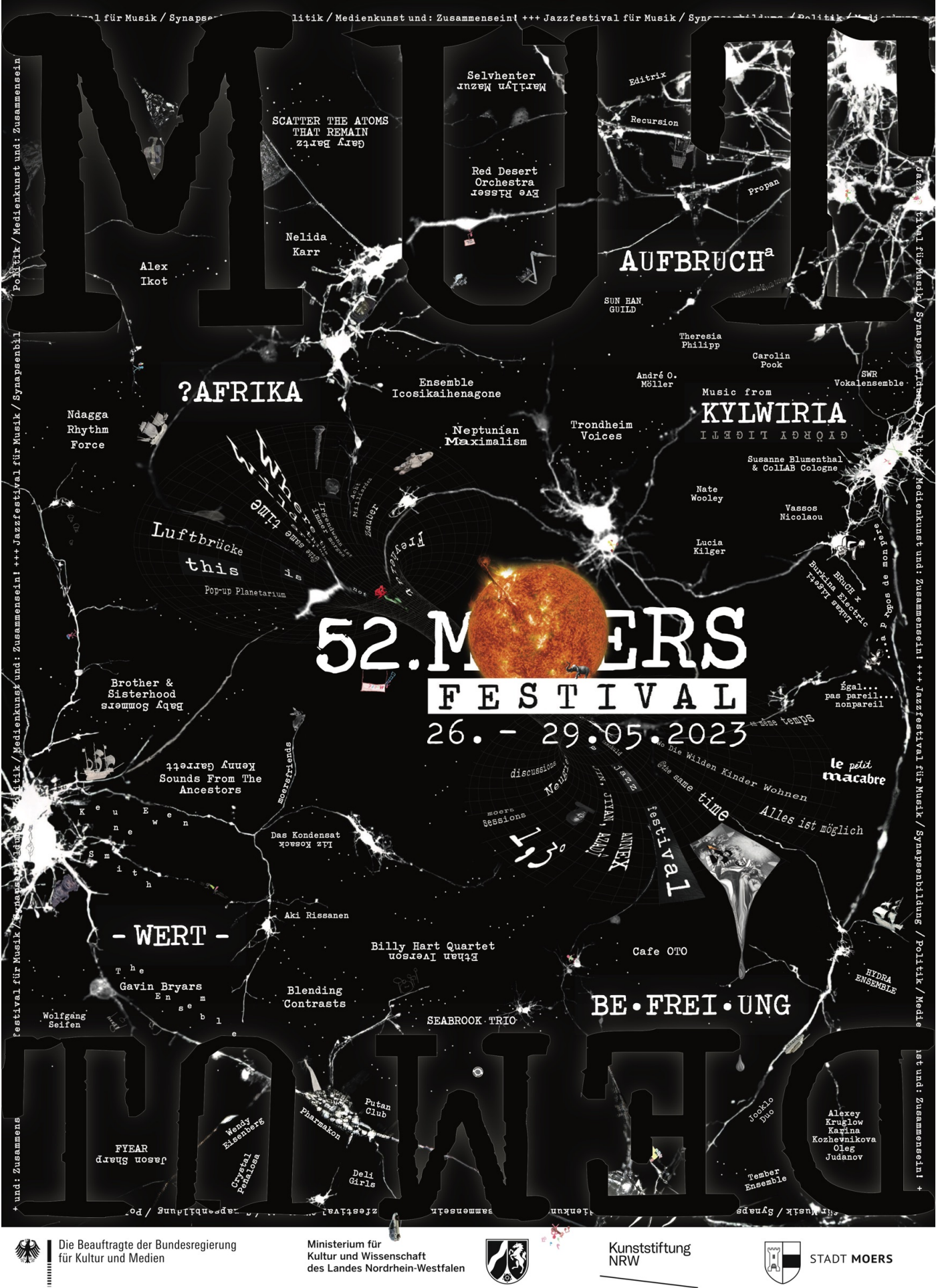

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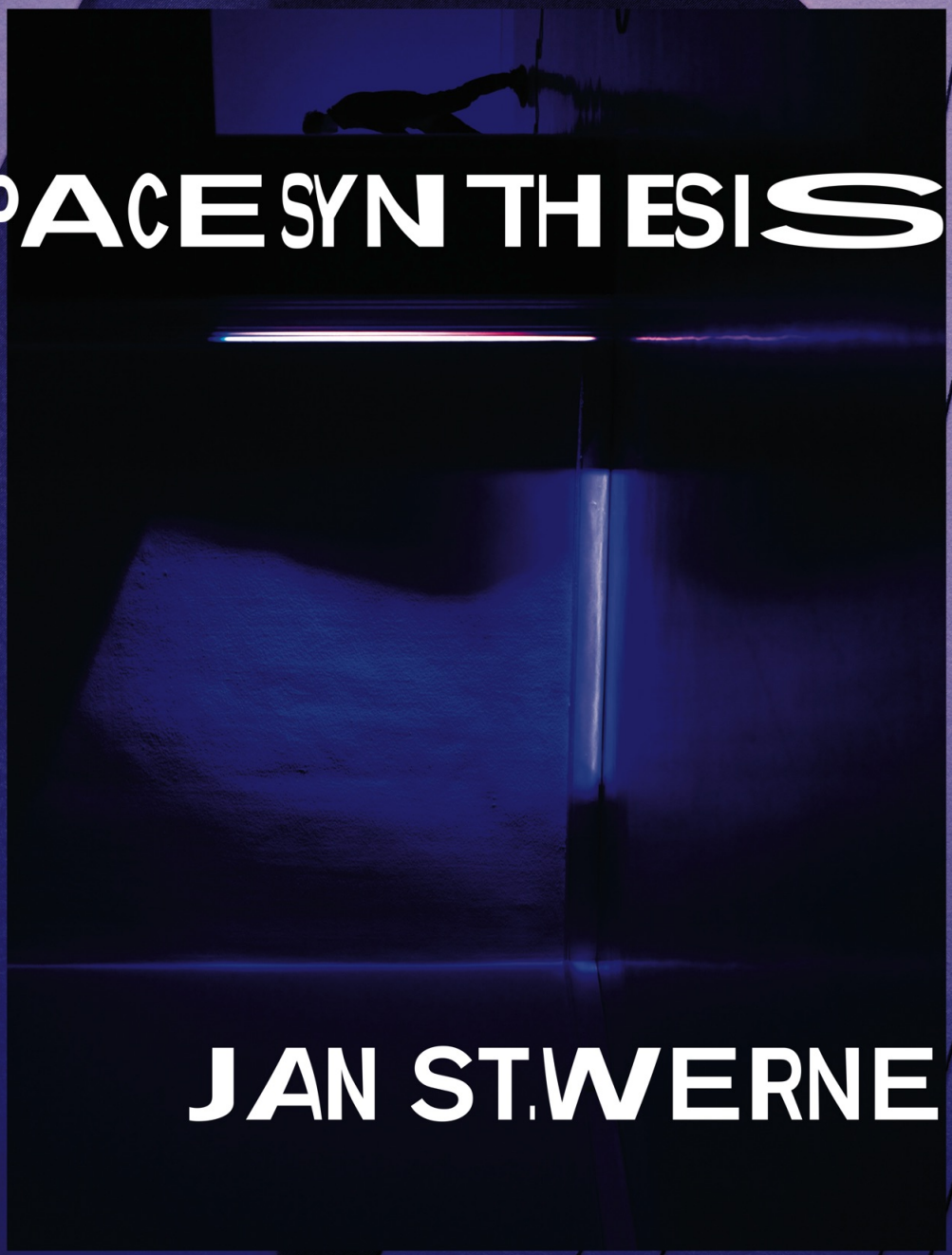

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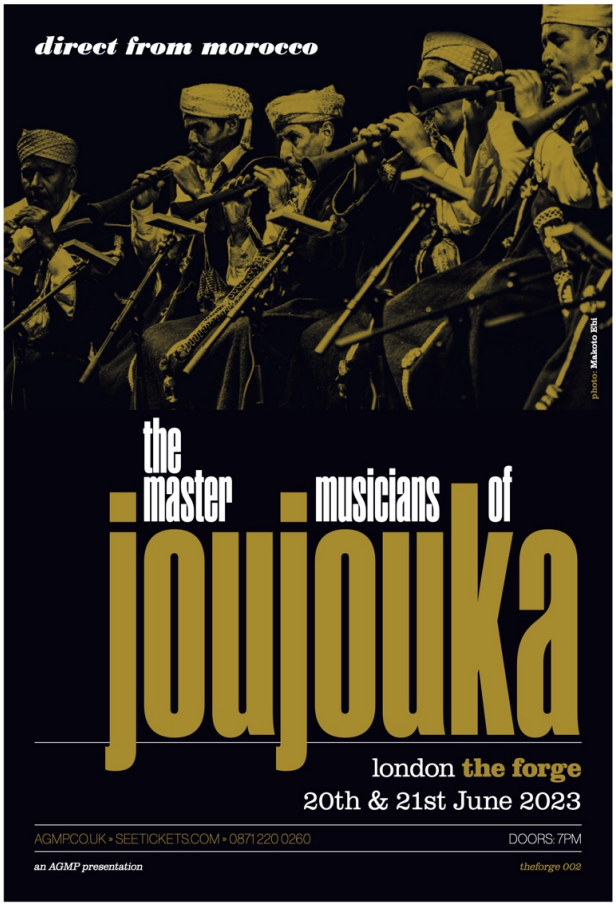
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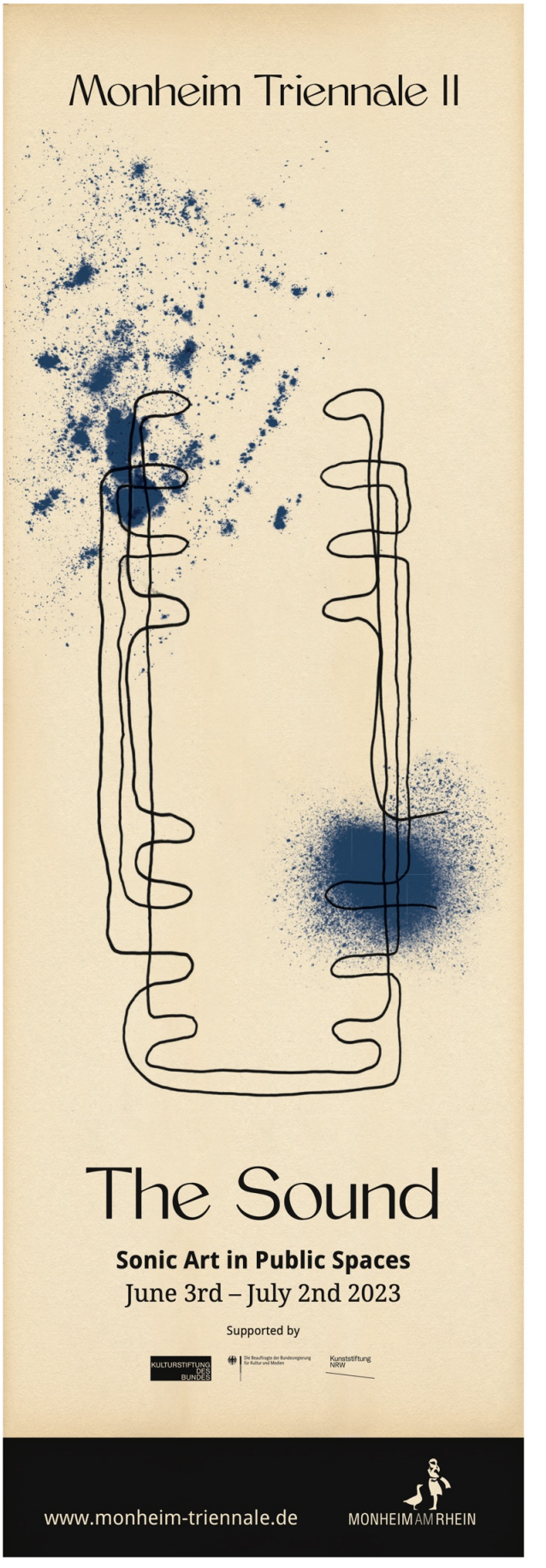
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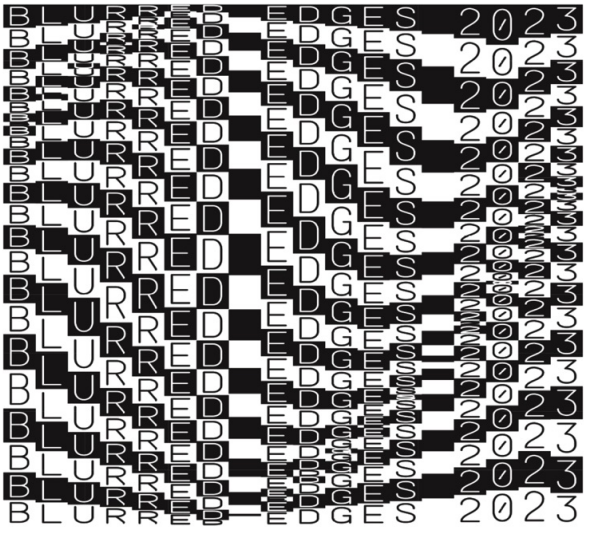

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Out There

UK festivals

Love Supreme
Among those appearing at the tenth anniversary of this jazz, funk and soul festival are Grace Jones, Little Simz, Marcus Miller, Thundercat, Tower Of Power, Courtney Pine, Mulatu Astatke, Binker Golding and Zoe Rahman, with more acts to be announced. East Sussex Glynde Place, 30 June–2 July, various prices, lovesupremefestival.com

Meltdown
Concert series programmed this year by Christine And The Queens. Highlights include serpentwithfeet (9 June), Let's Eat Grandma (10), Sqürl aka Carter Logan & Jim Jarmusch (11), Warpaint (12), Kokoroko (14) and Sigur Rós & London Contemporary Orchestra (16). London Southbank Centre, 9–18 June, various times & prices, southbankcentre.co.uk

Outbreak
Rock and rap festival with Death Grips, Earl Sweatshirt, Show Me The Body, Denzel Curry, Soul Glo, and many more. Manchester Depot Mayfield, 23–25 June, £135+fees, outbreak-fest.co.uk

International festivals

Artefact: The Ecstatic Being Belgium
Renovated Belgian dance venue reopens with a sound and music festival. Highlights include Klein + Crystallmess (8 June), Bendik Giske (9), Charlemagne Palestine & Seppe Gebruers (18), Ensemble Nist-Nah + Mohammad Reza Mortazavi (22) and OM Unit + Avalanche Kaito + Afrorack (24). Leuven Stuk, 8–25 June, various times and prices, artefact-festival.be.com

Beaches Brew Italy
Free festival on the shores of the Adriatic Sea with a diverse range of artists including billy woods, Mabe Fratti, Lankum, Liv.e, Pongo and Phelimuncasi. Marina di Ravenna Hana-Bi, 5–8 June, free, beachesbrew.com

Berlin-Budapest Express Hungary
Adventurous new music festival spread over a weekend in June and a weekend in September. The artists taking part in June are: Širom, Marina Herlop, Jessica Ekomane, Loraine James, Holland Andrews, Sven Helbig, Grischa Lichtenberger and LA Salami. Budapest House Of Music, 2–4 June & 15–17 September, digitalinberlin.de

Blurred Edges Germany
Two weeks of experimental music events spread across the city of Hamburg. An affordable programme of performances, lectures, video and sound installations. Hamburg musicians plus Fred Frith, Cat Hope, Tom Djll, Jooklo Duo and Tobias Delius. Plus music by Raven Chacon, John Cage and ,many more. Hamburg venues, 2–18 June, €45, vamh.de

Dark Mofo Australia
Dionysian festival of music, theatre and happenings. Music includes Black Flag, Thundercat, Max Richter, Sleaford Mods, Eartheater, Squarepusher, Bo Ningen, Keeley Forsyth and Loraine James. Hobart various venues, 8–22 June, various times and prices, darkmofo.net.au

Holland Festival Netherlands
Performing arts festival co-programmed this year by Anohni. Highlights include: Laurie Anderson's *Let X=X* (8 June), Eroica I with Sofia Jernberg (11), Lynette Wallworth's *How To Live (After You Die)* with music by Anohni and others (12), Jamie Man & Blixa Bargeld's *Dark Skies* (15), Sigur Rós & London Contemporary Orchestra (17), William Basinski's *The Disintegration Loops (For Euterpestraat)* (18), Raven Chacon's *Call For The Company* (20), CocoRosie's *What's Your Heaven* (24–25) and Tan Dun's *Requiem For Nature* (30). Amsterdam various venues, times and prices, hollandfestival.nl

Wire supported events

Cafe Oto UK
Events at North East London's venue for experimental music include: *Milford Graves Full Mantis* shorts screening + director conversation (1 June), Dawuna (2), DJ Travella + Brunnera (3), *The Wire* & Reece Ewing present *The Silent Eye* screening featuring Cecil Taylor & Min Tanaka + Pat Thomas & butoh dancer Mai Nguyen Tri (4), Wendy Eisenberg (5), Sophie Agnel/John Edwards/Steve Noble (6–7), Andy Moor at 60 (9), Diane Cluck (10–11), Robyn's Rocket with Phil Minton (15), XT + Sunik Kim (16), Dialect + Martyna Basta (17), Dead C + Roy Montgomery (19–21), Strangeness Of Jazz with Edward George (22), Tashi Dorji with Steve Noble (24), Apartment House perform Arthur Russell and Julius Eastman (26). London Cafe Oto, various times & prices, cafeoto.co.uk

Min Tanaka in *The Silent Eye*

Iklectik UK
Events at the South London performance space include: Wojciech Rusin + Anat Ben-David (1 June), Craft Ebbing + Bart (2 June), Steve Beresford & Darragh Morgan play Cage, Feldman and Stockhausen (6 June), All That Dust launch event with music by Rósa Lind, Soosan Lolavar and Aaron Einbond (14), Iván Muela + Ose (15), Doon Kanda + Gibrana Cervantes (21), Kit Records Social: Brunnera + Vic Bang + Yoto (22), upsammy + anything pointless + QBRNTHSS (23), Sandy Chamoun +Maya Al Khalidi with Sarouna (29). London Iklectik, various times and prices, iklectikartlab.com

***The Silent Eye* + Pat Thomas & Mai Nguyen Tri** UK
The Wire and Reece Ewing present the UK premiere of Amiel Courtin-Wilson's film of pianist Cecil Taylor and dancer Min Tanaka performing together in Taylor's Brooklyn apartment in 2016, followed by a live response to the film by pianist Pat Thomas and butoh dancer Mai Nguyen Tri. London Cafe Oto, 4 June, 8pm, £12–£6, cafeoto.co.uk

Terraforma Italy
Experimental music festival with a sustainability ethos taking place in woodland just outside of Milan. This year's programme is inspired by Don & Moki Cherry's Organic Music Society, with afternoon lectures and concerts co-programmed by Blank Forms, who published the book *Organic Music Societies*. Artists announced so far include: The Master Musicians Of Jajouka, Tikiman & Scion, Actress, Beatrice Dillon & Kuljit Bhamra, Dennis Bovell, Dawuna, Exotic Sin featuring Tyson, Hudson Mohawke, Donato Dozzy B2B Marco Shuttle, Batu, Josey Rebelle and Still House Plants. Milan Villa Arconati, 9–11 June, terraformafestival.com

Jazz Is Dead Italy
"Indefinable" Turin music festival taking place across four locations and seven stages. Programme includes Eiko Ishibashi & Jim O'Rourke, Irreversible Entanglements, Moin, Mabe Fratti, Boris, Pan Daijing, Shackleton, Sarah Davachi, Upsammy, Brandon Seabrook/Cooper-Moore/Gerald Cleaver and Gabriele Mitelli/John Edwards/Mark Sanders. Turin various venues, 26 May–9 June, various times and prices, jazzisdeadfestival.it

Joujouka 23 Morocco
Three days and nights of music from The Master Musicians Of Joujouka drums and pipes orchestra that dates back to the 15th century. Limited to 50 places. Joujouka Village, 2–4 June, €485, joujouka.org

Krake Germany
Club culture festival extending its embrace to differently abled artists. The free opening night features a screening of *Crip Camp – A Disability Revolution*, followed by a panel discussion on inclusion and cultural activism, and performances by Choolers Division and Bläck Dävil. Plus a 36 hour musical marathon from DJs and live performers ranging across punk, techno, house, electro and ambient including Drag Syndrome and DJ Stingray 313. Berlin House Of Music and ://about blank, 21 & 24–25 June, €25–€5, krake-festival.de

Mode Exchange Japan
33-33 takes its promotions to Tokyo with five concerts over nine days co-organised with Bliss. Featuring Eli Keszler, Beatrice Dillon, Merzbow, Kali Malone's *Does Spring Hide Its Joy*, Park Jiha, FUJI||||||||||TA, No 40, Kafka's Ibiki, Stephen O'Malley, Lucy Railton and more. Tokyo various venues, 25 May–2 June, various times and prices, mode.exchange

Oblivion Access US
Annual celebration of underground music and culture over a three day weekend. Line-up includes Faust, Godflesh, Clipping, Tim Hecker, Earth, Beak, Yellow Swans, Bing & Ruth, Drew McDowall, Jarboe and John Wiese. Austin various venues, 15–18 June, various times & prices, oblivionaccessfestival.com

Oluzayo: African Music Futures Germany
One-off festival for modern, contemporary, experimental and indigenous musics from Africa. Featuring Ensemble Modern & Vimbayi Kaziboni performing commissioned premieres, Ocen James & Rian Treanor, Sibusile Xaba, Ancient Voices, Jay Mitta & Kadilida, Victor Gama, Catu Diosis, Aurelie Lierman, Satch Hoyt, Hibotep, Gürzenich-Orchestra & Burkina Electric and more. Plus African Futures Live Radio. Cologne various venues, 31 May–4 June, various times and prices, €20–free, oluzayo-festival.net

Q3Ambientfest Germany
In person and virtual performances in classical, ambient and diverse genres by Julia Reidy, Laura Cannell, Mabe Fratti, Yair Elazar Glotman and many more. Potsdam Kesselhaus, 2–4 June, bruederselke.com

Sonar Spain
Barcelona iteration of the music and digital technology weekender. The extensive line-up features 700 Bliss, Aphex Twin, Lucrecia Dalt, Ryoji Ikeda, Bendik Giske, Cakes Da Killa, Klara Lewis & Nik Colk Void, Little Simz, Marina Herlop, Kode9's *Escapology*, Oneohtrix Point Never, Jana Winderen, Afrorack, and a Russell Haswell DJ set, among many others. Barcelona Fira Montjuïc, 15–17 June, €210–€80, sonar.es

Suoni Per Il Popolo Canada
Montreal's diverse festival of experimental music returns with concerts by Sun Ra Arkestra, Sarah Davachi, Maria Chávez, Andy Moor & Damon Locks, Ione, Homeboy Sandman, White People Killed Them, Farida Amadou & Radwan Ghazi Moumneh. Montreal various venues, 1–23 June, various times and prices, suoniperilpopolo.org

Tomorrow Festival China
Shenzhen new music festival with Marisa Anderson, Xylouris White, Phew & Dowser N, Tatsuya Yoshida & Kentaro Nakao, Mamer and more. Plus a talk by Sub Rosa's Guy-Marc Hinant and a screening of the film *Are'are Music* about the traditional music of the Solomon Islands. Shenzhen B10 Live, 9–11 June, b10live.cn

Tone Canada
Toronto's experimental music festival reaches its fifth edition with Sun Ra Arkestra, Ben LaMar Gay, Marc Ribot's Ceramic Dog, Ways, Zoh Amba & Chris Corsano, Caroline Davis, Andy Moor, Farida Amadou, Badge Époque Ensemble, Jack Wright, Jason Doell and White People Killed Them. Toronto various venues, 2–28 June, various times and prices, tonetoronto.com

Meredith Monk

Vision US/Online
In person and livestreamed improvised music and arts festival. Honoured with a Lifetime Achievement Award, double bassist Joëlle Léandre presents four different projects. The full programme includes Myra Melford, Nicole Mitchell, Fred Moten, Gerald Cleaver's Black Host, Hamid Drake's *Turiya: Honoring Alice Coltrane*, Mark Dresser 7, Patricia Brennan's More Touch, Mayan Space Station Flight 66 and Shamanic Principle. New York various venues, 13–18 June, various times and prices, artsforart.org

Special events

Art Night Dundee UK
Ten new commissioned live events, installations and performances presented around the centre of Dundee, including a new work by Tai Shani and others to be announced. Dundee various venues, 24 June, free, artnight.org.uk

Anthony Braxton Theater Improvisations US
An operatic realisation of *Compositions No 279–283* for comedian and improvising musicians by the composer and saxophonist. With musicians Ingrid Laubrock, Nate Wooley and James Fei. New York The Brick, 15–17 June, 8pm, $30–$20, experimentsinopera.com

Meredith Monk: *Indra's Net* Netherlands
World premiere of the composer's installation-performance inspired by a Buddhist tale about life's interconnectedness. Features Monk's Vocal Ensemble and a 16-piece chamber orchestra. Amsterdam Gashouder, 23–24 June, 8pm, €53–€12, hollandfestival.nl

La Monte Young & Marian Zazeela: *Just Charles & Cello In The Romantic Chord* US
Composition and visual setting for cellist Charles Curtis by drone composer Young and his light-artist partner Zazeela. The full title of the piece is *Just Charles & Cello In The Romantic Chord In A Setting Of Abstract #1 From Quadrilateral Phase Angle Traversals With Dream Light*. New York Peter Freeman Inc, 2 June 7pm & 4 June 4:30pm, $65–$55, blankforms.org

Online & hybrid events

Mopomoso Online
Streaming premieres of compilations of audiovisual works

Amber Mahoney

by improvisors and collaborating film makers and visual artists. Third Sunday of every third month. YouTube, 18 June, 17 September & 17 December, free, youtube.com

Roulette US/Online
In-person and livestreamed concerts at New York's experimental music space: Lester St. Louis's *Metahaven* (5 June), William Parker & Andrew O'Connor's *Music And The Shadow People* (11) and Nicole Mitchell & Christina Wheeler (27). Online & New York Roulette, various times and prices, roulette.org

Vision US/Online
Streams of this hybrid improvised music and arts festival will be available. For line-up details see International festivals, artsforart.org

Exhibitions & installations

Lisa Alvarado: Pulse Meridian Foliation US
The visual artist and Natural Information Society musician shares an immersive mural, a collection of double-sided paintings, a series of photos, and a sound installation. Los Angeles Redcat, until 20 August, free, redcat.org

Moki Cherry: Here And Now UK
Over 30 works and archival materials celebrating the Swedish artist's practice across textiles, sculpture, painting, drawing, writing, collage and video. Includes work made in collaboration with her partner Don Cherry and their Organic Music project. London ICA, until 27 August, ica.art

Le Cyclop De Jean Tinguely France
Recently restored 23 metre high steel sculpture in a forest setting outside Paris created by kinetic and Dada artist Jean Tinguely with his wife Niki de Saint Phalle and their artist friends. Sound artists Rie Nakajima and Pierre Berthet have created an installation featuring sculptures and sounds on the approach to it. Nakajima and Berthet also hold a one-off concert on site (13 May, 8:30pm). Milly-la-Forêt Le Bois des Pauvres, until 7 November, lecyclop.com

FM Einheit: *The Material Revolution* Germany
Sound installation by the onetime Einstürzende Neubauten member in a former coal power station. The composition combines sound samples from the power station when it was working, along with invented instruments made from industrial waste. Luckenwalde E-Werk, until 1 July, kunststrom.com

Moki Cherry, *Title Unknown* (1971)

Punk: Rage & Revolution UK
The story of punk told from a local and national perspective. Includes the first retrospective of original Vivienne Westwood clothing. Co-curated by local youth. Leicester Museum & Art Gallery, 27 May–3 September, rageandrevolution.co.uk

Jan St Werner: Space Synthesis Germany
Mouse On Mars member's first solo exhibition transforms the gallery space into a large sound space, with light, movements, distractions and interventions. There will also be an accompanying performance and lecture programme across three weekends. Baden-Baden Staatliche Kunsthalle, until 2 July, €11–€3, kunsthalle-baden-baden.de

UK screenings

F(r)ee: Behind The Scenes Of The Free Movement
Screenings of Alessandro Ugo's new documentary about the counterculture of the Tekno free music scene and its illegal parties. Each screening has a director Q&A. London Rio Cinema (9 June), Bristol Cube Cinema (11) and Nottingham Broadway Cinema (22 June). docnrollfestival.com

UK & Ireland on stage

Arooj Aftab/Vijay Iyer/Shahzad Ismaily: Love In Exile
Brooklyn based vocalist and composer Aftab who grew up in Pakistan performs in a new trio with pianist Iyer and multi-instrumentalist Ismaily. London Barbican Hall, 2 June, 8pm, £30–£10, barbican.org.uk

Laurie Anderson: *Let X = X*
The composer, multimedia and spoken word artist performs material from across her career. Anderson is joined by Steven Bernstein (trumpet), Briggan Krauss (saxophone), Tony Scherr (bass), Kenny Wollesen (drums) and Doug Weiselman (clarinet). London Barbican Hall, 11 June, 8pm, from £35, barbican.org.uk

Cobalt Studios
Independent Newcastle arts space: Pram (1 June), Tashi Dorji (29) and Nat Sharp's *Ecosex Fun House* (30). cobaltstudios.co.uk

City University
Last in the free concert series: Sekar Enggal & Byron Wallen's *Music From West Java & Ethiopia's Mulatu Atsatke* (1 June) and Tullis Rennie reimagines his recent album of mutant chilled club music *Fixed Freedoms* on Accidental with Preetha Narayanan, Tara Franks, Cath Roberts and Dee Byrne (2). London City University, 7pm, free/register in advance, city.ac.uk

Curious Ear
Manchester monthly improv nights with Luigi Marino & Michael Thieke + Andrew Cheetham/David Birchall/Dan Bridgwood-Hill. Manchester Peer Hat, 19 June, £8–£5, curiousear.net

Tashi Dorji
Improvising guitarist beyond style yet drawing on a polyphony of styles: London Cafe Oto (24 June), Glasgow The Glad Cafe (25), Anstruther Futtle (26), Leeds Wharf Chambers (28), Newcastle upon Tyne Cobalt Studios (29). julietippex.com

Editrix
Massachusetts post-punk trio fronted by guitarist/vocalist Wendy Eisenberg: Brighton The Hope And Ruin (1 June), Bristol The Crofters Rights (2), London The Lexington (4). editrix.bandcamp.com

Hundred Years Gallery
Concerts of improvised and other music at this intimate London Gallery continue with: matinee: Steve Noble/Oren Marshall/Alan Wilkinson (18 June, 3:30pm), Florence Uniacke/Jamie Coleman/Daniel Thompson/Douglas Benford (24 June). London Hundred Years Gallery, times and prices vary, hundredyearsgallery.co.uk

London Improvisers Orchestra
Five afternoon and early evening concerts over three days for the large pool of improvisors playing conductions, free music and other experimental forms. London DivFuse, 16–18 June, various times, £2, divfuse.com

Loudspeaker Orchestra
Music for multiple loudspeakers with the Touch label in among the exotic plants of a roof garden. Bethan Kellough embraces winds, waves and other atmospheric and geological processes. London Crossrail Place Roof Garden, 21 June, 7pm, £5, loudspeakerorchestra.org

The Master Musicians Of Joujouka
The Moroccan drums and pipes ensemble who trace their roots back to the 15th century return for

Anders Sune Berg, Galleri Nicolai Wallner

their first London performances for 40 years. London The Forge, 20–21 June, 7pm, £60.50–£38.50, joujouka.org

Pere Ubu
David Thomas's band celebrate the release of *Trouble On Big Beat Street* on Cherry Red. London Rich Mix, 2 June, 7:30pm, £26, dice.fm

Pram
A handful of UK dates for Birmingham's cinematic post-rock band: Newcastle upon Tyne Cobalt Studios (1 June), Stourbridge Claptrap (2), London Moth Club (3) and Bristol The Cube (4), dominomusic.com

Shakti
John McLaughlin and Zakir Hussain mark the release of the first new studio album in 46 years by their Indo-jazz fusion ensemble. The current line-up features vocalist Shankar Mahadevan, violinist Ganesh Rajagopalan and percussionist Selvaganesh Vinayakram. London Eventim Apollo, 27 & 28 June, 6:30pm, £60–£50, serious.org.uk

Sly & The Family Drone
Heavy jazz-noise fire. London Moor Vaults, 1 June, 7:30pm, £14, dice.fm

Sophia Club: Survival At The Edge
London edition of the international "live philosophy" club which exchanges ideas through conversation and music. Featuring psychologist Emma Barrett and drummer Charles Hayward. London St Martin Martin-in-the-Fields Crypt, 8 June, 8:30pm, £20–£15, sophiaclub.co

Sound Unwrapped
Concert series exploring spatial dimensions in live performance including a 19 loudspeaker sound system: Robert Henke's *Dust* (3 June), Suzanne Ciani (11), Hannah Peel & Beibei Wang (16), Laura Cannell's *Antiphony Of Trees* (17). London Kings Place, various times & prices, kingsplace.co.uk

Le Tigre
The post-riot grrrl mischief makers return: London The Troxy (3 June), Manchester Albert Hall (5) and Glasgow Barrowland Ballroom (6). letigre.world

Xiu Xiu
Los Angeles experimental rock trio: Bristol Strange Brew (3 June), Glasgow Broadcast (4), Edinburgh Sneaky Pete's (5), Salford The White Hotel (6), London Earth (7) and Brighton Green Door Store (8). xiuxiu.bandcamp.com

Incoming

A L'Arme! Germany
Berlin's adventurous music festival plays host to Joy Guidry Radical Acceptance, Kassa Overall, MoE featuring Mette Rasmussen & Veslemøy Narvesen, Ken Vandermark, Carl Michael von Hausswolff and Thomas Ankersmit Serge 50. Berlin Radialsystem, 10–12 August, €80/festival pass, €25/day, alarmefestival.de

End Of The Road UK
North Dorset music festival with an eclectic line-up including Wilco, Arooj Aftab, Angel Olsen, Ezra Furman, Kokoroko, Lee Fields, Moin, John Francis Flynn, Big | Brave, Oren Ambarchi, MC Yallah & Debmaster, They Hate Change, Horse Lords, Divide & Dissolve, Avalanche Kaito, Julia Reidy, Deliluh, among many others. Dorset Lamer Tree Gardens, 31 August–3 September, £235–£135, endoftheroadfestival.com

Heroines Of Sound Germany
Tenth edition of this festival dedicated to female pioneers in electronic music. Concerts, sound art and panel talks from Beatriz Ferreyra, Ale Hop, Electric Indigo, Billy Roisz, and many more. Berlin Radialsystem, 6–9 July, €56–€15, heroines-of-sound.com

Jazz Em Agosto Portugal
New currents in jazz and beyond with Eve Risser Red Desert Orchestra, Myra Melford's Fire And Water, Natural Information Society & Evan Parker, Ghosted, Hedvig Mollestad's Ekhidna, Susana Santos Silva, Julia Reidy, Trance Map+, Marta Warelis, Camille Émaille, Zoh Amba Trio, Eve Risser and Mary Halvorson's Amaryllis. Lisbon Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 27 July–6 August, gulbenkian.pt

Météo Mulhouse France
40th anniversary edition of this festival of improvisation and experimentation with four days and nights of concerts, workshops, commissions and DJ sets. Performers include Sofia Jernberg & Alexander Hawkins,Ben LaMar Gay, The Dwarfs Of East Agouza, Mats Gustafsson, Damon Locks, Clara Levy, Julien Desprez, Mette Rasmussen, Maurice Louca, Joke Lanz,Maria Chávez/ Mariam Rezaei/Victoria Shen, Elvin Brandhi, The End, Mike Reed and Alexis Degrenier. Mulhouse various venues, 23–26 August, €135–€50, festival-meteo.fr

Monheim Triennale Germany
The second edition of this festival in a town near Düsseldorf focuses on sound art in public spaces over the course of a month. Participating artists include Chris Watson, Emeka Ogboh, Robert Wilson, Caroline Devine, John Grzinich and Staalplaat Soundsystem. Monheim am Rhein various venues, 3 June–2 July, monheim-triennale.de

Mutek Canada
Electronic music and digital creativity festival with Ale Hop, Deena Abdelwahed, Grand River, Hieroglyphic Being, Alessandro Cortini, µ-Ziq, Tim Hecker and more to be announced. Montreal various venues, 23–27 August, $350–$160, montreal.mutek.org

Odysseus Finland
The Finnish label and magazine *We Jazz* presents three days of eclectic music on Lonna Island. Line-up so far announced includes Ahmed Ag Kaedy & Will Guthrie, Fennesz, Julia Reidy, Jeremiah Chiu & Marta Sofia Honer, Mary Lattimore, Frise Lumière, Linda Fredriksson Juniper, Oruã, Virta, Lampen and others. Helsinki Lonna Island, 21–23 July, wejazz.fi

Rally UK
Eclectic one day festival with Space Afrika, Yazz Ahmed, Loraine James, Caroline, Dave Okumu & The Seven Generations, Wu-Lu and many more. London Southwark Park, 5 August, noon–11:30pm, £55–£33, ra.co

Semibreve Portugal
Portuguese festival of electronic music and digital art. With performances, installations, talks and workshops in several locations across the city of Braga. Artists so far announced include Kali Malone, Nkisi, Kassel Jaeger & Eléonore Huisse, Emeralds, Mumdance and Tujiko Noriko & Joji Koyama. Braga various venues, 26–29 October, festivalsemibreve.com

Supersonic UK
20th anniversary edition of the Midlands music festival. First line-up announcement includes Godflesh, Lankum, 75 Dollar Bill, Backxwash, Deerhoof, Avalanche Kaito, Horse Lords, MC Yallah & Debmaster, Big | Brave, Jessica Moss, Blacks' Myths, Ex Easter Island Head, Josephine Foster, Ashenspire, Hey Colossus, Shovel Dance Collective and more. Birmingham venue to be announced, 1–3 September, £250–£160, supersonicfestival.com

We Out Here UK
Four day family festival in Dorset curated by Gilles Peterson mixing up jazz, soul, dub, electronic and diverse dances musics. With live performances from Sun Ra Arkestra, Ezra Collective, Cymande, Black Star, Black Midi, Meshell Ndegeocello, Nubya Garcia, Knucks, Goldie, Channel One, LTJ Bukem Roni Size, Flowdan, Alabaster dePlume, Dave Okumu, Makaya McCraven, Space Afrika and Wu-Lu. Dorset Wimborne St Giles, 10–14 August, £228, weoutherefestival.com

Send listings at least two months in advance to listings@thewire.co.uk. For more events listings go to thewire.co.uk/events, follow @thewiremagazine on Twitter, and sign up to our weekly newsletter at thewire.co.uk/newsletters

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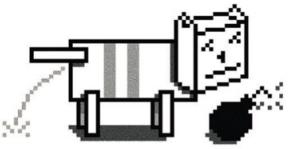

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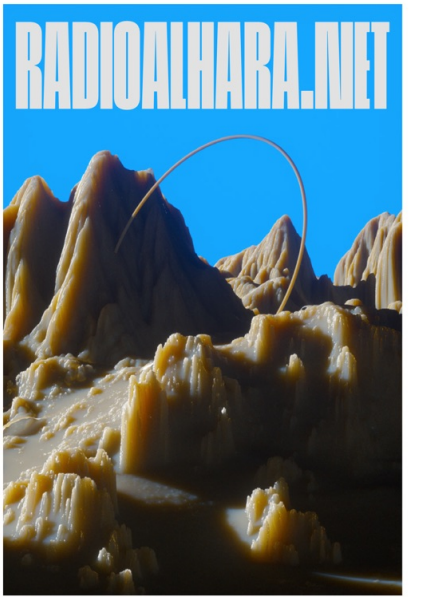

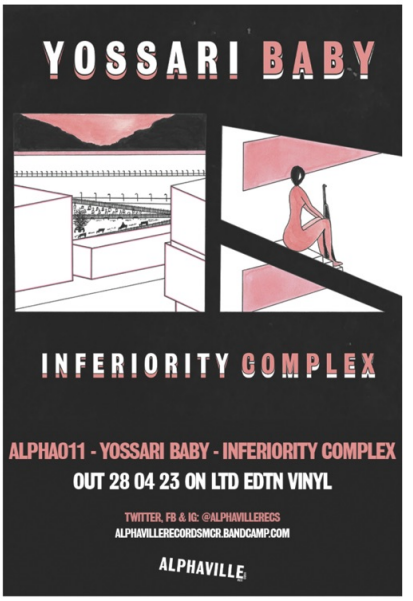

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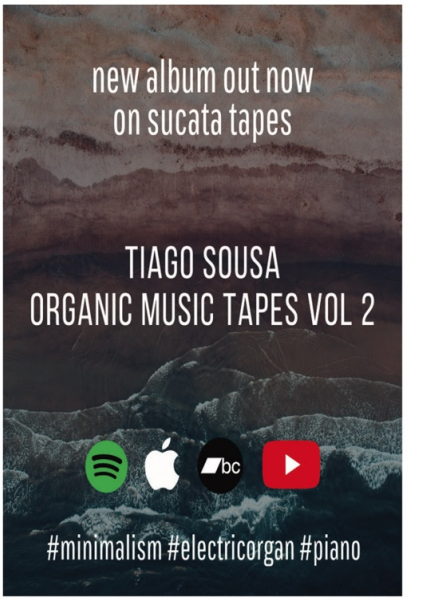

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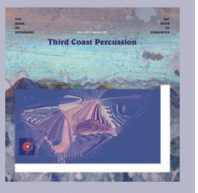

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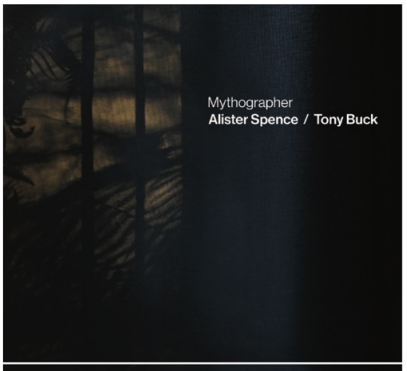

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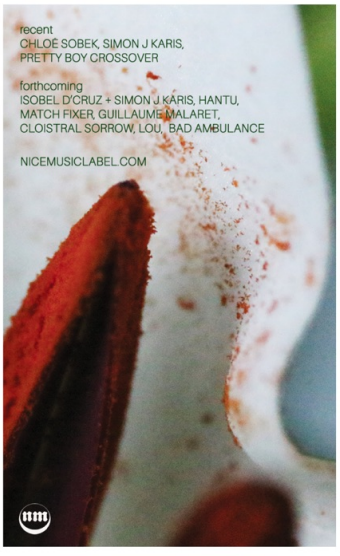

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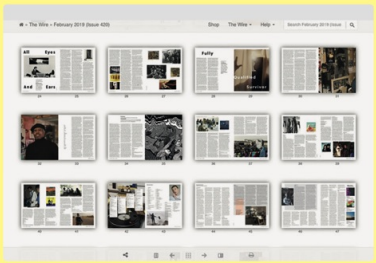

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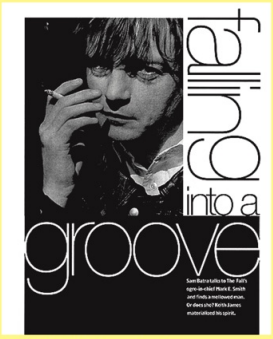

Mark E Smith interviewed
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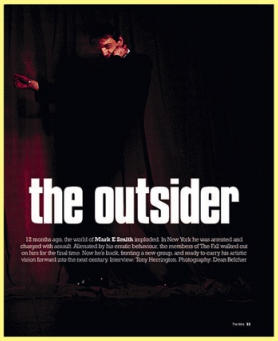
Issue 111 May 1993

Mark E Smith's Invisible Jukebox
tested by Dave Haslam
Issue 134 April 1995

Mark E Smith interviewed
by Tony Herrington
Issue 151 September 1996



Mark E Smith interviewed
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Issue 183 May 1999

Mark E Smith's second Invisible Jukebox
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Simon Ford on the founding of
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The siren voice of Patti Smith lures writer and no wave mover Adele Bertei to New York

The summer of 1975 was an adrenaline rush of shiny new insights, but its winter was wretched discontent. I was 20 years old, living in a studio apartment and working as a silversmith apprentice. Returning home each night covered in red polishing compound, I'd flop down on the wall bed feeling tragic, defeated. My dreams of making music were on hold while I attempted the rudimentary skills of adulthood, like opening a bank account, writing cheques, paying bills. Buying groceries. Acing the rocket science of the perfect hard-boiled egg. Requirements I was not prepared for when I was a ward of the state. On what would end up being a defining moment and night, I was more than a little pissed off at the world.

Add to this my being torn up with guilt. I'd unwittingly murdered my first pet, a cockatiel named Byron. The clerk at the pet shop never bothered to tell me that hanging one of those cute birdie mirrors in the cage was tantamount to assisted avian suicide. Mesmerized by his own image, poor Byron clung to his perch frozen in the mirror, trembling with the self-love of an iridescent Narcissus. He couldn't tear his tiny unblinking eyes away from his own beak, no matter how cheerful my serenade or how sweet the sugary crumbs I tried to feed him. Within a week of having brought him home, I found his stiff little corpse on the birdcage floor, wide-eyed and gone.

The bird's demise seemed a portent of doom, and my chances of being a singer, poet, writer or actor were nil. My lack of education rendered me socially crippled and unprepared for adult life. I wanted to sing, pursue music as a career, but what record company would ever offer a deal to a white girl-hoodlum who pimp-walked her way through life like a fraudulent Iceberg Slim?

I stared at the ceiling listening to the radio, Cleveland's WMMS and my favourite DJ Billy Bass. I lay there ruminating when Pink Floyd's "Wish You Were Here" reached out of the airwaves to fortify my misery. As the song's jangly guitars faded, the sombre piano chords of the next track overtook... and then suddenly, an eerie voice began a slow, sexy bleed into the room: *"Jesus died for somebody's sins but not mine..."*.

The foreign vibration of her voice, an electric current. The room was lit up by a fierce and ragged poetry, incantations reaching in to unlock the space inside where my yearnings ached for release. Patti Smith arrived with a heretical dare: to break free from the corsets confining a girl's heart and mind. *"Gloria!"* I heard all the lost girls singing inside that hymn. The wild girls who did not see themselves in mothers or mirrors or houses of the holy.

Patti Smith pumped out an affirmation that we who live outside of society will not be denied. We who are in this world but not of it must seize and take of life on Earth every piece of passion it has to give and to give back, freely, without shame. The scratching guitars, piano and drums, voices building into a road. *"Gloria!"* Battle cry of an alien hailing the girl, the God in the woman, in excelsis deo.

Her voice and delivery were hardly traditional in the sense of female vocalists. She was Dylan-esque, in that it was more about the poetry, the rhythmic cadence and rawness of her fierce delivery, and that mix of tender piano with garage band guitars and thrash arrested your senses by gunpoint.

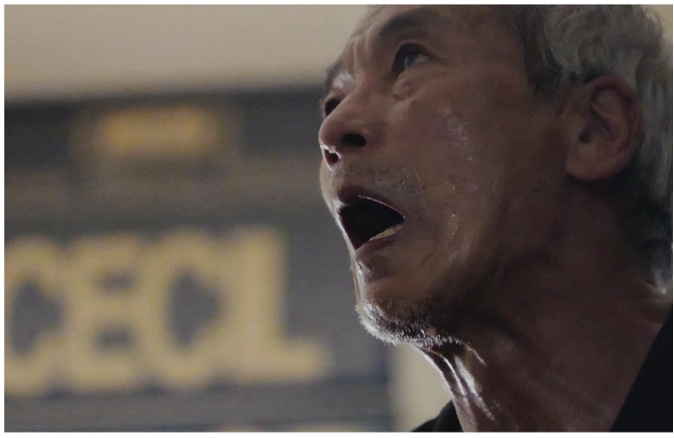
Smith's debut LP *Horses* was released in 1975 when conventionally gendered female singers like Helen Reddy, Diana Ross, Olivia Newton-John and Gladys Knight ruled the airwaves. Androgynous Patti Smith and her band were the brazen contrast; outlaw poets who dared to smash any trace of conformity to rock 'n' roll norms and female rock presentation.

I was a queer kid caught in an oppressive scene in Cleveland, Ohio at a time when being authentically queer could prove fatal. No one was out. I looked like a boy. This I could not hide, and there were times when I was beaten and abused when discovered in a relationship with another girl. Female singers were feminine, pretty, mannered. They didn't read Percy Bysshe Shelley or sing about anarchy. I felt alien, condemned by a society that didn't want me and that I certainly wanted no part of.

One need only look at the cover of *Horses* to feel how her look of defiance and style would inspire a cloudburst of hope in a kid like me. As New York's downtown scene of the late 1970s would prove, I was not alone. Riding on that hope, my search commenced for compatriots in new sound and vision, and I left for New York's East Village. Patti Smith invited us into the sacred past of holy outlaw artists who'd come before, beckoning all who dared to walk that path with her. To shake off the chains of gender and conformity. To shake up a ghost dance. It was time for me to fall in step. ○

Adele Bertei is a writer, film director and former member of The Contortions. Her childhood memoir *Twist: An American Girl* is published by Ze Books

The Wire & Reece Ewing in association with Flood Projects present the UK premiere of



THE SILENT EYE

featuring Cecil Taylor & Min Tanaka

The Silent Eye is a 2016 film of pianist Cecil Taylor and dancer Min Tanaka performing together in Cecil's apartment in Brooklyn, New York.

Shot over three days by the Australian film maker Amiel Courtin-Wilson, this unique 70 minute film is an intimate and impressionistic meditation on domesticity, friendship and play featuring two of the most radical artists of our time.

The screening will be followed by a response to the film in the form of a performance by pianist Pat Thomas and butoh dancer Mai Nguyen Tri.

London Cafe Oto, Sun 4 June, 8pm
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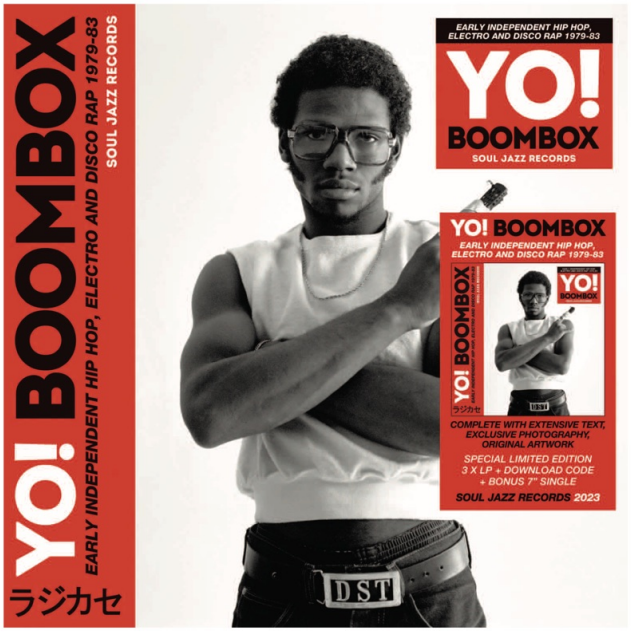

YO! BOOMBOX

EARLY INDEPENDENT HIP HOP, ELECTRO AND DISCO RAP 1979-83

SJR LP530-7/LP530/CD530 Rel Date 19 May

Yo! Boombox is the new instalment of Soul Jazz Records' Boombox series on the early days of hip-hop on vinyl and features some of the many innovative underground first-wave of early rap and disco rap records made in the USA in the period 1979-83. This new collection celebrates these first old-school rap records, bringing together rare, classic and obscure tracks released in the early days of rap.

BROWN SPIRITS

SJR LP/CD525 Rel Date 12 May

Sounds like Can meets Hawkwind! Unbelievably killer and super heavy brand new psyche/Krautrock album. Brown Spirits are from Melbourne, Australia. Their stripped down and tight musical unit is a trio (think Cream or Hendrix!) of raw bass, drums and shared guitar/keyboards meets D-I-Y attitude and punk/post-punk intensity that gives them a unique hi-octane sound.

HORTENSE ELLIS

People Make the World Go Round SJR471-7

Alton Ellis' sister Hortense delivers the deepest, super-funkiest heavy reggae version EVER of this soul anthem originally by The Stylistics. Powered by tight horns, hypnotic, locked in organ guitar. It's a monster + tuff dubbed out flip. 100% Essential!

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Guns of Navarone SJR472-7

Seminal Ska all-time ANTHEM on new clean loud pressing. Originally released in 1965 in Jamaica and UK, the Skatalites insanely addictive ska tune always sounds fresh and fills any dancefloor! Check the stunning ska dancer tribute to Marcus on the flipside - killer. 100% Essential!

ALTON ELLIS

Blackish SJR473-7

Alton Ellis's hypnotic funky roots anthem – a surreal dream of a 'Blackish White' coming down. Rarely has such lyricism been heard in reggae music. Bomb tune! 100% Essential!

LONE RANGER

Love Bump SJR474-7

All time party Studio One dancehall tune from the legendary Lone Ranger, guaranteed to make people dance. Monster, monster tune! 100% Essential!

DANSETTE DAMAGE

The Only Sound SJR511-7

Super-cool one-off collectors pressing bespoke 500 copies ONLY! Comes in fold out paper sleeve and specially silk-screened Punk 45 outer sleeve

Superb exact reproduction of this excellent two-sider (double B-side!) 'The Only Sound'/ 'New Musical Express', the debut punk single by Dansette Damage from Birmingham, originally released on the tiny Shoestring Records in early 1978. Rel Date 2 June